THE RED ARROW

ELMER RUSSELL GREGOR

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THE RED ARROW

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FLUSHED WITH TRIUMPH, THEY TURNED THEIR FACES TO THE SKY AND GAVE THANKS TO THE GREAT MYSTERY

THE RED ARROW

AN INDIAN TALE

BY

ELMER RUSSELL GREGOR

AUTHOR OF

"CAMPING ON WESTERN TRAILS" ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

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THE RED ARROW

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THE RED ARROW

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I

WHITE OTTER BEGINS A PERILOUS JOURNEY

THE sun was just peeping above the eastern rim of the plain as White Otter mounted his pony and rode from the great Sioux camp. He was departing upon his first war journey, and his heart filled with pride as the people gathered at the edge of the village, beating the war-drums and singing their war-songs. The lad carried himself with all the confidence and dignity of a seasoned warrior, and the Sioux looked upon him with approval. He was a handsome youth of sixteen winters, tall and sinewy, with keen, steady eyes and an alert, intelligent face. An orphan, he had been brought up by his grandparents, Wolf Robe, the venerable

Sioux war-chief, and old Singing Wind, his squaw. His grandfather had given him his favorite war-pony, his buffalo-hide war-shield, and his weapons; and Singing Wind had presented him with several pairs of moccasins and a great, soft buffalo robe which she had tanned with her own hands.

White Otter had arrayed himself with great care, as befitted one departing upon the war-trail. He had carefully oiled and divided his long black hair into two braids, which he had bound with rabbit-skin. At the top of his head he had braided a scalp-lock, to which he had fastened a hawk feather. His dress consisted of a breech-cloth and soft doeskin leggings which reached to his thighs. About his waist he wore a twisted rawhide belt, to which were fastened his knife-sheath and a small buckskin bag containing dried meat. His bow and arrows were inclosed in a handsome otter-skin case which he carried on his back, and at his side hung a weasel-skin pouch containing his fire-sticks. His pony, a clean-limbed little piebald, was without saddle or bridle; a rawhide lariat twisted about its lower jaw was the sole means of control. Its mane and tail had been skilfully braided and

decorated with hawk feathers and strips of fur.

The lad rode away in silence, for he knew that it was not the part of a warrior to give way to his emotions. The snow had retreated to the mountain-tops, the prairie was dotted with wild flowers, and the air was filled with the music of birds. Spring was ripening into early summer and the great Western country was at its best. Having passed from sight and sound of the camp, White Otter stopped his pony and looked about him with reverent appreciation. The world seemed filled with sunshine and song, and he found it good to be alive. His heart filled with gratitude, and he raised his eyes to the sky and gave thanks to the Great Mystery for the blessings which he had bestowed upon his people.

Then as he rode slowly across the vast plain the young Sioux began to realize the perilous nature of the mission upon which he had embarked. He had been sent at his own request to recover the Red Arrow from the Pawnees. Many years before, that famous medicine-trophy had been stolen from the Sioux medicine-lodge by a daring young

Pawnee. The Sioux had made countless efforts to recover it, and many warriors had forfeited their lives in the attempt. White Otter had heard the tales of their heroism recited at the Sioux council-fire, and they had filled him with a longing to achieve the exploit. When he reached the age at which it was necessary to begin his career as a warrior, therefore, he went to his grandfather and announced his intention of going upon the perilous quest. Well pleased with the lad's courage, Wolf Robe called his warriors in council and told them White Otter's ambition. It met with instant approval, and they decided that he should go upon the venturesome journey.

The day was far spent when White Otter discovered a small band of antelope a short distance to the west of him. He stopped his pony and dismounted to stalk them. Hobbling the piebald with a piece of rawhide, he crawled toward several small boulders which were about half-way to the antelope. When he finally reached the rocks, however, he saw that he was still out of bow-shot of his quarry. Fearing that he would be discovered if he attempted to approach nearer, he determined

to try an ancient Sioux stratagem which he had learned from his grandfather.

Draping the buffalo robe upon his bow, White Otter raised it above his head. In a few moments the antelope saw it and became curious. Having attracted their attention, the lad began to wave the lure. After they had watched it some time the inquisitive creatures began to advance. Continuing the manœuver, the crafty hunter gradually enticed them within range. Then he threw the robe from his bow and drove an arrow through the heart of the foremost buck.

After supplying himself with sufficient meat for his journey, White Otter continued across the plain. At sunset he turned toward a small grove of cottonwoods. He found an ideal camp site, with water and grass, and he decided to camp there for the night.

As darkness settled upon the plain the young Sioux sat beside his little fire and meditated upon his task. He realized that to be successful he must expose himself to great peril. The Pawnees were implacable enemies, and he knew that he could expect no mercy if he fell into their hands. He also knew that the undertaking demanded a high

order of skill and strategy, and for a moment he doubted his ability. Then he recalled the deed of the young Pawnee. He asked himself if White Otter, the son of Standing Buffalo and the grandson of Wolf Robe, the great Sioux war-chief, was less daring than that reckless lad. The mere suggestion drove the hot fighting-blood to his brain and filled his heart with courage. He determined to duplicate the Pawnee's exploit or forfeit his life in the attempt.

Having come to this bold decision, White Otter rose and walked to the edge of the grove. The night hush had fallen upon the plain and the world was stilled in slumber. The lad raised his eyes to the heavens. The sky was studded with a vast multitude of stars. He looked upon them with reverence, for he had been taught that they were the camp-fires of departed warriors on the trail to the Spirit-land. Then he saw the dim, mystic trail itself stretching across the sky, and he believed that it was marked with the footprints of his parents. White Otter was overwhelmed by a sense of his weakness, and he opened his heart to the Great Mystery. He prayed for strength to complete his task,

for courage to face the peril, and for wisdom to cope with his enemies.

Then a coyote raised its dismal cry. The spell was broken. The prairie-wolf had found the dead antelope and was summoning its fellows to the feast. Answering wails rose from all parts of the plain, and the peace of the night was destroyed. The Sioux returned to his fire.

Soon after daylight White Otter resumed his journey. At midday he was halted by a river which the spring rains and the snow-water from the mountains had transformed into a raging yellow torrent. It was swift, and deep, and wide, and he looked upon it with gloomy misgivings. As he watched the water racing past he had grave doubts of ever reaching the other shore. It seemed foolhardy to make the attempt. As he hesitated, however, he thought he heard a challenge in the sullen hissing of the water. It seemed as if the river were laughing at his caution and accusing him of cowardice. A great wrath entered his heart. He asked himself if it was the part of a Sioux warrior to turn back at the first obstacle. Then, laughing scornfully, he lashed his trembling pony into the flood.

Once in the water, the gallant little piebald began a valiant battle against the current. White Otter was swept from its back, but he saved himself by grasping its mane. Farther down the river he saw a seething whirlpool, and he knew that, once in its grip, there would be no escape. He tried to guide the struggling pony from the danger, but his efforts were futile. He realized that he must depend upon the piebald to save him. It was making a superb fight for its life, but the odds against it were terrific and White Otter had little hope. Each moment the game little beast was being swept nearer its doom. The Sioux turned its head up the river, and urged it to still greater efforts. He knew the only chance was to reach the center of the stream before they were swept abreast of the whirlpool. Then he heard the ominous hiss of swirling water, and he glanced fearfully over his shoulder. His heart failed him, for the pony was almost upon the whirlpool. A moment later he felt the current twisting them about and he cried out in despair. The piebald was swept swiftly around the edge of the great sucking pool, and the despairing lad shuddered as he saw the water boiling down

into a yawning funnel-shaped cavern. Twice they were whirled dizzily around the border of the death-trap, and then the pony fought its way from the clutches of the pool.

Having regained the main channel, they resumed their fight to reach the opposite shore. The piebald had covered two-thirds of the distance when it began to weaken. White Otter again saw death staring him in the face, for he realized that in such a crisis his own strength was of no avail. Believing himself lost, the lad determined to die as his father had died, fighting to the end. He exhausted himself urging the frantic pony to redouble its efforts. Several times it carried him beneath the water as he endeavored to guide it to the shore. Then his own strength collapsed, and he clung helplessly to the floundering beast he had tried to save. As though it understood that its own life and the life of its master might be saved by one final, supreme effort, the choking pony kept its nose above the waves and struggled wildly to reach the shore. The heroic battle finally ended in victory, and the piebald staggered weakly from the water and dragged the young Sioux to safety.

Both White Otter and the splendid little beast which had saved him were thoroughly exhausted, however, and it was some time before they were strong enough to continue the journey. When the lad finally mounted and rode away he found himself upon a great undulating prairie. It was carpeted with a splendid crop of grass and watered by a tributary of the river, and he saw deep trails and other signs which led him to believe that he had entered the summer range of the buffalo. The thought filled him with a longing for the chase, and he rode slowly along the stream, keeping a sharp watch for the great beasts he hoped to find.

The sun had already set when White Otter finally discovered the buffaloes directly ahead of him. He approached as near as he thought wise, and then he made his camp in the bottom of a shallow ravine, for he had decided to postpone his hunt until daylight.

II

THE BUFFALO HERD

AT daybreak White Otter looked upon a sight which would have quickened the pulse of the most hardened hunter. The plain was covered with buffaloes. Wherever he looked he saw them grazing in small scattered companies. Some were less than two arrow-flights away. The lad was fascinated. He rejoiced in the opportunity to verify the tales told by the Sioux hunters. For the moment the stirring scene drove all thought of the chase from his mind, and he concealed himself behind a convenient boulder and remained an interested spectator.

He saw great shaggy-headed bulls, handsome sleek-coated cows, and awkward, long-legged calves. The outside of the vast herd was composed of aged males, surly, keen-eyed sentinels, ever on the alert for danger. They

were irritable and quarrelsome, and were constantly fighting among themselves. Beyond them, always at a safe distance, hovered murderous bands of hungry coyotes, waiting for a chance at the helpless calves.

Then the Sioux saw a flash of white near the edge of the herd, and his eyes lighted with excitement. He peered cautiously over the rock, and his heart beat wildly as he discovered a cream-colored yearling feeding with its fellows. White Otter could scarcely believe his eyes. He looked again and again, fearing that his imagination had tricked him. However, when the animal did not vanish or change color he knew it was real. It was a trophy for which any Sioux hunter would gladly have risked his life. There were only two such robes in the tribe, and for each the chief had given fifty ponies. The lad knew that the pelt of this rare albino would bring him fame and fortune, and he longed to possess it.

Trembling with eagerness, White Otter slid into the ravine and led his pony along the bed of the stream. The high banks concealed him, and he hoped to steal upon the buffaloes without being seen. When he was opposite

the albino and its companions he rode up the steep side of the gully.

White Otter's appearance instantly threw the great herd into confusion. The cows and calves crowded together in panic, the bulls trotted nervously to and fro, and the pugnacious old sentinels bellowed hoarsely and pawed the plain. The lad hesitated only long enough to locate the albino and then he urged his pony forward at top speed.

For a moment the buffaloes watched him in stupid astonishment, and then as he came nearer they lowered their heads and thundered away in a wild stampede. Even the blustering old bulls weakened at the last minute and galloped awkwardly along in the rear of the rout. The cream-colored yearling was well to the front, and the Sioux realized that he must ride furiously. Urged on by the anxious lad upon its back, the fleet-footed little piebald rapidly closed upon the herd, and White Otter soon found himself among the laggards. A wild-eyed bull turned to offer him battle, but he drove an arrow through its heart and raced on in pursuit of the leaders. The spirit of the chase had

seized him, his blood was on fire, and, unmindful of the danger, he rode recklessly into the great company of crowding buffaloes.

As the courageous pony shouldered its way toward the front White Otter was almost suffocated by the stifling dust-cloud that enveloped the herd, and he was compelled to face a constant volley of pebbles and earth thrown back from the hoofs of the animals ahead of him. The lad realized that he was risking his life, for the piebald was running in close quarters, and he knew that a false step meant death. Two great bulls were crushing his legs against the ribs of his horse, and he attacked them savagely with his knife. They swerved aside, and his pony crowded past them. The next instant a calf went down directly under the feet of the piebald, but the latter saved itself by jumping, and White Otter yelled excitedly.

Each moment the buffaloes crowded closer together, and the Sioux found himself imprisoned in the jam. He had lost sight of the albino, and as he looked forward at the solid mass of great beasts running shoulder to shoulder he realized that he had little chance of coming up with it. He saw that it would

THE SPIRIT OF THE CHASE HAD SEIZED HIM, AND HE RODE RECKLESSLY INTO THE GREAT COMPANY OF CROWDING BUFFALOES

be folly to attempt to force the piebald through those close-packed ranks, and he reluctantly abandoned all hope of securing the coveted trophy.

Then White Otter suddenly realized that he was trapped. For a moment the thought filled him with panic. He looked wildly about him for a way of escape. He knew that if he attempted to stop his pony he would be instantly run down and trampled into the plain by the buffaloes behind him. To attempt to turn aside would be equally fatal. He believed his only chance was to gradually slacken the speed of the piebald, in the hope that the buffaloes might run by him. In a few moments he tried the experiment, and the buffaloes began to crowd past on each side. Several times White Otter was compelled to fight them off with his knife to save his legs from being crushed. As the piebald dropped steadily back toward the rear of the herd the lad took hope, for he believed that if the pony kept its feet he would eventually escape.

When he was almost free he saw a death-trap looming up directly in the path of the herd. A short distance ahead of him a

deep ravine stretched across the plain, and White Otto knew that the buffaloes would plunge into it. Blind with senseless panic, the animals in front would be unlikely to discover it in time to swerve and save the herd. The great company behind them were rushing forward with the irresistible force of an avalanche. Unable to see the pitfall which awaited them, they would sweep their leaders into the ravine and plunge over the bank on top of them.

White Otter realized that unless he escaped from the jam he was lost. A company of stubborn old bulls had closed in behind him, and they were forcing the piebald ahead of them. The Sioux knew that he must act quickly to save himself, for the leading animals were already tumbling into the ravine. He turned and shot his arrows at the massive heads against his pony's rump, but the thick skulls were impenetrable, and he groaned in despair. Then, finding it impossible to reach the vital spot behind the shoulder, he aimed at the dusty backs, and his arrows went home. One by one the great bulls went to their knees or turned aside, badly wounded. Quick to seize the opportunity, the frenzied lad pulled

the piebald into the gap and emerged safely from the stampede.

White Otter watched the herd pile up in the ravine, and his heart filled with pity for the splendid creatures which were hurling themselves to destruction. Many were killed beneath the hoofs of their comrades, and many more struggled from the gully desperately wounded. Those that were uninjured climbed to the plain and galloped away.

Then the lad was amazed to see the albino coming directly toward him. He dismounted and crouched behind his pony, hoping that the buffalo might come within range. It saw him, however, and swerved off. The Sioux mounted and galloped after it. It was apparently uninjured, and the race was a hard one. The albino turned back toward the ravine, and White Otter rode wildly to intercept it. As he finally headed it off the buffalo turned at bay, and the lad approached with caution. Then the albino charged, and White Otter turned his pony and drove home an arrow at close range. Maddened by the wound, the buffalo flashed about and rushed savagely at the piebald, but the lad's second arrow sent the frantic beast to its knees. As

it struggled to its feet the daring young Sioux charged by within bow-length and drove a third arrow through its heart. Then he jumped from his pony and ran forward to count a coup by striking the dead buffalo with his bow. It was a signal of victory which entitled him to recite the adventure at the council-fire.

After carefully removing the priceless pelt White Otter sang a Sioux war-song and danced around the buffalo. Then he saw a large golden eagle circling high above him, and he believed it was a good omen. Cutting a large piece of meat from the carcass, he held it above his head as an offering to the great war-bird of his people.

Then, having performed the customary ceremonies, White Otter mounted his pony and rode toward the foot-hills, which were less than a half-day's journey away. As the sun was barely at the zenith, he hoped to reach them before dark. Behind them towered the mountains, great snow-capped peaks close against the sky. The lad looked upon them with superstitious awe, for he had been told that they sheltered the mysterious Thunder Bird, and the great bear which could kill

a bull buffalo with one blow of its paw. It was the first time White Otter had been within sight of them, for the Sioux were a prairie people, and he determined to explore the rugged peaks and learn for himself whether the tales he had heard were true.

He approached the foot-hills with great caution, realizing that enemies might lie hidden in the timber. Before venturing within arrow-range he stopped to reconnoiter. For a long time he searched the low wooded slopes for a trace of smoke or anything which might proclaim the presence of concealed foes. When he saw nothing to arouse his suspicions he rode slowly forward. As he drew nearer, however, he dropped to the off side of his pony, and advanced at an angle, with his body sheltered behind the piebald. It was a trick which several times had saved his grandfather, and Wolf Robe had cautioned him to remember it.

White Otter reached the timber in safety, and found a well-worn game trail leading up from the border of the plain. He followed it to a grassy park, and found a spring and many fresh deer tracks. Hoping to see the shy creatures themselves before dark, White

Otter concealed his pony and seated himself to watch at the edge of the timber.

It was not long before a twig snapped over at the opposite side of the park. The lad fitted an arrow to his bow and peered anxiously into the woods. However, as he saw nothing moving, he attributed the noise to some small animal passing through the undergrowth. Then he saw the top of a small tree tremble, and he instantly became alert. A moment later a splendid black-tail buck appeared at the edge of the park. It raised its nose into the air, and thrust forward its great ears, searching the wind for danger. But the wind was false to its trust, for at that instant it veered to the opposite quarter and the buck was deceived. Believing that all was well, the handsome creature walked boldly into the open. Each step brought it nearer its doom, for the calm-eyed young Sioux had already aimed his arrow at its heart. The black-tail stopped to crop a mouthful of grass, and then it went forward to drink at the spring. Twice it lowered its head, and each time it suddenly straightened and looked nervously about the little park. Its enemy was skilfully concealed, however, and the

wind gave no warning. The buck was apparently convinced that its suspicions were unwarranted, and again it lowered its head and plunged its muzzle into the pool. A moment afterward it fell with a Sioux arrow through its heart.

The park was an attractive camp site, and White Otter decided to remain there for the night. As darkness came on, however, he wished himself back on the open plain. He was oppressed by a feeling of dread. The massive peaks seemed to cast a spell of gloom over him. They shut out much of the sky and towered above him like grim, destroying monsters of the night. To the prairie lad it seemed that he was at the portals of a mysterious world of giants. An avalanche of sliding snow thundered down into a near-by cañon, and White Otter sprang to his feet in alarm. A few moments afterward an owl hooted, and he wondered if he had heard the voice of the Thunder Bird. The weird tales of old Yellow Horse, the medicine-man, ran through his mind, and each new sound added fuel to his imagination. Then he heard a wild scream ring through the night, and, as he was unfamiliar with the hunting cry of

the mountain-lion, the young Sioux feared that some evil spirit of the mountains had discovered his fire. He fitted an arrow to his bow and sat staring wide-eyed into the dark. However, as the time passed and nothing came to disturb him, he finally laughed away his fears and lay down beside his fire.

The Sioux was sleeping soundly when the great sinewy cat that had startled him with her scream walked from her lair high up in a granite ledge and sniffed the keen night-wind which crept up the mountain. It carried the blood-scent, and the lioness growled deep in her throat like an angry dog. She heard the hungry cries of her kittens, and her eyes softened at the sound. Then the wind again brought its message, and she bounded away into the night and stole stealthily down into the foot-hills in search of the kill.

White Otter was awakened by the frightened snorting of his pony. Seizing his weapons, he jumped to his feet and hurried toward the piebald. It was trembling with panic, and the lad knew that danger of some sort threatened him. As he listened he heard something moving near the carcass of the

deer. Then he heard a snarl, and, looking toward the sound, he saw a pair of fiery eyes glaring at him from the dark. They shone with a weird greenish luster which sent a shudder through him. Then, as he recovered from the shock and aimed his arrow, they vanished, and the excited lad had doubts of their reality. He wondered if he was confronted by some kindred spirit of the Thunder Bird. A moment later he heard something attempting to drag away the buck. His fear instantly left him as he asked himself if it were the part of a Sioux warrior to stand weakly by while another robbed him of his spoils. Enraged by the thought, he crept forward with every muscle set for action, with every sense keenly alert, ready to battle for his life.

As the lad moved slowly across the park he saw something crouching beside the carcass of the deer. Then he again saw the flash of those terrifying eyes. This time, however, they did not vanish, and the Sioux hesitated, for he read a challenge in their angry gleam. Was he confronted by the great bear of the mountains? His heart bounded at the thought. Unable to re-

sist the tantalizing target, he released his arrow.

The twang of the bowstring was followed by an enraged snarl, and then a long, black shape leaped through the dark. White Otter sprang aside, and the lioness missed him and disappeared into the night. An instant later he saw the glint of her eyes, and he freed another arrow; it hummed its way into the dark, and the Sioux knew he had failed. Then, except for the nervous snorting of his pony, all was still. White Otter peered anxiously into the blackness; he wondered if the strange beast had slunk away. He looked in vain for the warning flash of its eyes; he strained his ears to catch the sound of a stealthy footfall. Was the savage intruder creeping toward him? Was it preparing for another spring? The possibility filled him with alarm. As White Otter was unable to guess from which direction the next attack might come, each moment increased his suspense.

Then he had a sudden warning of danger behind him. He turned just in time to drive an arrow into the crouching beast which was stealing upon him from the rear. Mortally

wounded, the lioness made her death-leap and threw White Otter to the ground. However, he escaped with nothing more serious than a few scratches, for the lioness expired as she struck him.

White Otter had seen the pelts of these great mountain-cats brought into camp by Sioux hunters, but this was the first time he had looked upon the animal itself. He attempted to drag the lioness across the park, but it was an unusually large one and the lad found his strength unequal to the task. Then he brought some embers from his fire, and when he had kindled them into flame he sat down in the ruddy glow to examine the strange beast he had killed. He looked solemnly into the fierce face; he lifted the great padded paws, with their long, sharp talons; he felt the powerful muscles in the shoulders, and he parted the snarling lips and saw the cruel, doglike tusks. The lad had heard the hunters tell many boastful stories about their encounters with these savage beasts, and he remembered that old Yellow Horse pointed proudly to a long white scar on his breast which he claimed had been made by the claws of one of these cats. Therefore, having

killed the fearsome mountain creature, the young Sioux looked upon himself as a real warrior, and he counted many coups, and passed most of the night singing and dancing about the lioness.

III

A DAY OF ADVENTURES

THE next morning, after concealing the carcasses of the deer and the lioness and assuring himself that the plain was free of enemies, White Otter left his pony in the foot-hills and set out to explore the mountains. The tales about the fierce creatures which inhabited their rugged fastnesses had aroused his curiosity, and he was determined to see some of them. He was particularly anxious to find a great white ram with queer curved horns which lived far up on the most inaccessible pinnacles. Yellow Horse had told him that none but the most daring hunters had ever looked upon it, and White Otter was eager to share the distinction.

Among the foot-hills the lad saw many deer and several bands of elk, but as he was well supplied with meat he made no attempt to hunt them. Then he came to the steep,

pine-clad slopes which clothed the base of the mountains. Climbing was hard work, and when he finally left the timber and struggled up to the barren, wind-swept stretches of slide-rock, he was forced to stop for breath. He seated himself on a boulder and took note of his surroundings. To a lad of the prairie the mountainside was bleak and inhospitable. The trees had dwindled to mere wind-twisted shrubs, and the vegetation had degenerated to a dry black lichen which only added to the somberness of the cold gray rocks it adorned. The Sioux felt depressed; he missed the grass and the flowers and the birds, and he looked longingly upon his beloved plain.

After a long, exhausting climb White Otter at last came to the edge of the vast precipitous snow-field which extended to the very base of the pinnacles he wished to explore. It was an unfamiliar barrier, and the lad mistrusted it. He was forced to cut footholds in its icy crust, and the ascent became difficult and dangerous. When he was half-way to the top he was halted by a thunderous roar from a giant peak at his left, and, turning his head, he saw a great avalanche of sliding snow sweep down the mountainside. It sug-

gested a new peril, and White Otter shuddered as he realized that the frozen mass over which he was crawling might break loose at any moment.

Then he suddenly came upon the foot-prints of the great white ram. They differed from those of the elk, the deer, and the ante-lope, and White Otter knew them at once. As the trail was fresh, he determined to follow it. It led him across the face of a treacherous snow-field, and along a narrow ice-coated ledge. The old medicine-man had told him that these agile animals could walk where no other foot could follow, and the lad believed that his words were true. The ledge shrank to a mere shelf, which stretched across an almost perpendicular wall of ice-crusted rock, and White Otter realized that a false step would plunge him to the bottom of a cañon more than a thousand feet below.

Then he came to a place where the rocky wall bulged and cut deep into the narrow trail, and he stopped in dismay. It seemed foolhardy to go farther, for the tiny shelf which led around the projection was scarcely wider than his hand. White Otter found himself in a perilous predicament. Unable

to turn around, he was trapped on the narrow ledge of slippery rock. He gazed hopelessly down into space, and then up at the towering wall of granite. His only choice was to round the projection in the hope of finding a wider trail on the other side.

Realizing that delay would only weaken his courage, White Otter prepared to make the daring attempt. He found a handhold in the granite and, with his body crowded close against the rock, he slowly edged his way along the narrow shelf. It was a torturing ordeal, and he was compelled to strain his muscles almost to the breaking-point before he finally clambered safely around the obstruction and found a wider ledge.

The lad had barely recovered from his exertions when he heard the rattle of loosened stones and saw the white ram bounding away. As it was out of range he made no attempt to kill it. The creature's wonderful agility held him spellbound. He watched in amazement as it leaped from crag to crag, raced recklessly along a tiny shelf of rock, and launched itself into space and alighted on a small rocky platform far below. Then looking defiantly up at the intruder, the ram

jumped behind a great boulder and disappeared around a shoulder of rock.

Realizing the folly of attempting to follow it, White Otter knew that there was nothing to do but to retrace his course. Once more that bulging "chimney" of rock barred his way and threatened him with destruction. Having already accomplished the difficult task, however, he believed he could do it again. At any rate, he was compelled to try, for there was no other way. Again he flattened his body against the rock and cautiously slid his feet along the tiny ledge. Once he felt his fingers losing their grip and a deadly weakness seized him, but he found a new handhold in time to save himself, and once more he clambered safely around the obstruction.

White Otter found the descent more perilous than the climb. However, he finally reached the foot of the snow-field without mishap, and made his way down the treacherous stretch of slide-rock. As he neared the timber he saw something moving along the edge of the woods. He stopped to watch it. A moment later he identified the great bear of the mountains, and his heart filled with

joy. He told himself that here was the chance to prove his courage, for among his people a necklace of bear-claws was accepted as indisputable proof of bravery.

The lad had the wind in his face, and he felt sure that the bear had not discovered him. It was a huge animal, and as he looked at it the young Sioux recalled many tales of the ferocity of these surly beasts. He knew that, once aroused, it would fight to the death, and the thought put him upon his mettle. White Otter realized that he must get close, for he had heard that it required many arrows to kill these powerful brutes. He wondered how he might approach within bow-shot. He crawled slowly forward among the rocks, but before he had covered half the necessary distance the bear disappeared into the forest. Fearful of losing his opportunity, White Otter rose and hurried recklessly to the edge of the woods. Concealing himself behind a tree, he peered anxiously into the shadows. There was no sign of the bear, and, although he held his breath to listen, his keen ears caught no sound. The lad was puzzled. It seemed impossible for an animal of such size to have disappeared so quietly. Then he saw where

the bear had stopped to dig in an ant-hill, and with that for a clue the determined young Sioux attempted to follow the trail.

Old Wolf Robe had thoroughly instructed him in the art of tracking, and as a result the lad followed the dim trail without much difficulty. The footprints were indistinct and far apart, but he found other signs that showed him which way the animal had gone. A broken twig, a dislodged stone, some fragments of bark from a fallen tree, all these things were plain reading. White Otter knew that at any moment he might come upon the animal itself, and he fitted one of his strongest arrows to his bow and held several more in his left hand, ready for instant use. Where the undergrowth was thick he stopped and reconnoitered before he ventured into the cover. He came to a marshy place, and found huge tracks filled with muddy water. The lad knew that the bear was within sound of him, and he stole forward as silently as a shadow. Then a twig snapped, and his heart bounded at the sound. Tightening his bowstring, he wheeled to defend himself, but he saw nothing more dangerous than a pine-squirrel, which flashed up a tree-trunk and

scolded savagely. The trail led down to an open park, and as White Otter crawled stealthily to the edge of the timber he saw the bear digging out another colony of ants.

White Otter's eyes widened with amazement at the enormous size of the beast before him. He understood now why a necklace of bear-claws had such value. The bear was within easy range, but the astounded lad delayed his attack. He realized that unless he pierced its heart the wounded beast would charge him in blind fury. The slender flint-tipped shafts which he held in his hand seemed utterly insufficient for such an antagonist. Then as the bear turned broadside to him he overcame his fears and bent his bow until the head of the arrow rested against his left hand. For an instant he held it sighted against the great shaggy shoulder, and then he released the bowstring.

The arrow buried itself deep in the massive form, and the bear whirled with the agility of a lynx and snapped off the willow shaft close to the wound. Fearing that he had missed the heart, White Otter released a second arrow. It struck beside the first, and the shock sent the bear to its knees. The

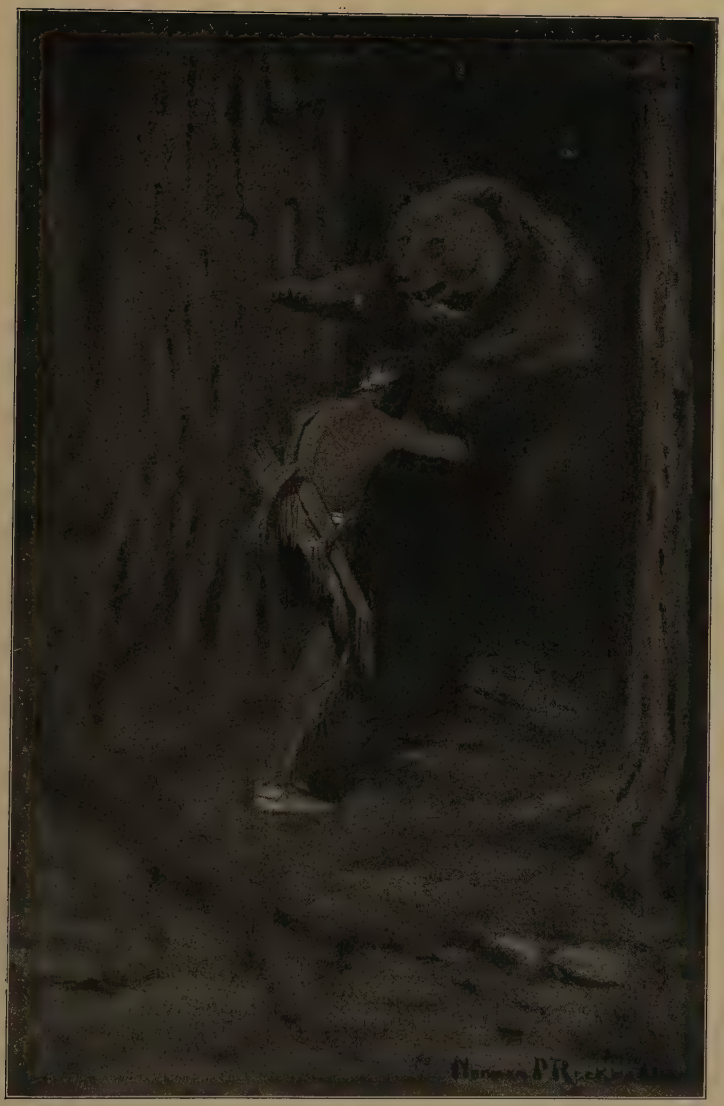
next instant it was upon its feet, roaring with rage, and the lad freed the third arrow. Then the bear charged him. Realizing the folly of attempting to stop it, he sought safety in the nearest tree. Wolf Robe had told him that these great mountain-bears were poor climbers, and White Otter depended upon the assurance. A moment later his heart filled with dismay as the frenzied creature began to claw the tree-trunk. The Sioux drove an arrow into its shoulder, and the bear dropped to the ground. Then, much to the amazement of the excited young hunter, it turned and made off through the woods.

Fearful of losing his prize, White Otter descended from the tree and began a cautious pursuit. He heard his quarry crashing through the undergrowth, and he hurried in the direction of the sounds. Then the noise suddenly ceased, and the lad stopped to listen. He heard nothing but the furious beating of his own heart, and he wondered if the bear were dead. Then a more alarming possibility flashed through his mind. Perhaps the wily brute had heard him and was hiding in ambush. White Otter's resolution was somewhat weakened by the thought. He

knew that over-confidence had caused the death of more than one noted Sioux hunter, and he realized that he must be careful. Still, he knew that he must face the peril, for he told himself that to turn back would be the act of a coward. Determined, therefore, to uphold the traditional bravery of his people, the lad went forward. He advanced a few steps, and then he stopped to listen. As the silence was unbroken he believed that the bear had succumbed to its wounds.

White Otter turned toward a tangled thicket of aspens in which he had last heard the bear. He approached within short bow-shot, and then he stopped and threw several stones in the hope of inducing the animal to expose itself. The ruse failed, however, and he felt sure that the bear was dead. He waited a few moments and then he entered the thicket.

The impulsive lad had not taken five strides before he found himself facing the wounded bear. There was no time for flight, and as the enraged brute rose upon its hind legs White Otter drove two arrows into its breast. Then he sprang back, and the bear plunged to the ground and lay still. The



THERE WAS NO TIME FOR FLIGHT, AND AS THE ENRAGED BRUTE ROSE UPON ITS HIND LEGS WHITE OTTER DROVE TWO ARROWS INTO ITS BREAST

Sioux covered it with his arrow until the powerful muscles ceased to tremble, and then he ran to the body and counted a coup.

While White Otter was stringing the great claws on a buckskin thong to wear about his neck a solitary horseman was riding toward the foot-hills. As he came within bow-shot of the timber he stopped his pony and gazed intently at the low wooded slopes. Then, having discovered nothing to arouse his suspicions, he continued to the base of the ridge. He rode slowly along the edge of the plain and found the game trail which led to White Otter's camp site. Then he discovered the tracks of the piebald, and he dismounted to examine them. In a few moments he straightened, and led his pony up the trail.

As the horseman approached the park the piebald whinnied, and he grasped his pony by the nostrils before it could reply. Then he muzzled it with a piece of buckskin and led it from the trail. He looked anxiously about him as though he feared an attack, but the piebald continued to call, and he knew that it was unattended. Leaving his own mount concealed in the timber, the newcomer stole cautiously around the edge of the

park. He hesitated a moment as he came in sight of the picketed pony, and then he ran from the edge of the woods and led the piebald away. He tied it beside his own horse and went back to watch for the owner.

The stranger was a lad about the age of the young Sioux. He was shorter and more thick-set than White Otter, but he had the same sort of keen, unflinching eyes, and the same type of strong, manly face. He, too, was dressed for the war-trail. His hair was divided into two braids, which were bound with the white winter pelt of the weasel. In his scalp-lock he wore a single eagle feather, which proclaimed him a warrior. His dress was somewhat similar to that of White Otter, and consisted of doeskin leggings and breech-cloth, and a beautifully tanned robe of the black bear. His war-shield was decorated with a crude drawing of a flying bird and a large red orb, symbolizing the rising sun. His pony was a wiry little buckskin.

When he had fastened the necklace of bear-claws about his neck White Otter hurried down the mountainside in high spirits. The day was ending, and the foot-hills were

already in shadow. As he approached the spot where he had left his pony he stole forward with the caution of a lynx. Then he came to a sudden stop and stared in amazement. The piebald had disappeared.

The perplexed lad fitted an arrow to his bow and looked nervously about him. He saw nothing of the picket stake, and he realized that the pony might have pulled it loose and wandered away. But there was a possibility that an enemy had found the piebald and had carried away the stake to deceive him. The only way to solve the riddle was to venture into the open and follow the tracks. The park was surrounded by a heavy growth of bushes, and White Otter feared that an enemy might be lurking in ambush. He saw nothing to confirm his suspicions, however, and, realizing that if the piebald had wandered away he must lose no time in overtaking it, he determined to crawl forward and investigate.

The young Sioux crept through the cover as cautiously as a fox, and when he came to the end of it he stopped and listened. A bird sang in the woods behind him, and then all was quiet. He rose and stepped into the

open. For a moment he hesitated, and then, as he was not attacked, he went on. As he stooped to examine the hole left by the picket stake an arrow hummed past within a hand-breadth of him. White Otter realized that he had been trapped. As he bounded into the nearest cover a second arrow struck the tree behind which he sought shelter.

White Otter peered carefully around the tree-trunk, but saw nothing of his enemy. He believed there was only one, for he told himself that if there were more he would have been attacked from all sides. Then, to his amazement, he heard some one chanting a Sioux war-song. The unknown singer seemed to be in the woods opposite him. For a moment he mistrusted his ears, and then, as he recognized the words, his perplexity increased. Several questions leaped to his mind. Had some wandering tribesman come to his assistance, or was his enemy endeavoring to decoy him into the open? It was a boastful song, which told of the bravery of the Sioux and scorned the weakness of their enemies. As he listened, White Otter became convinced that only a Sioux could put such a challenge into the words. When the singer stopped, the lad spoke.

"I do not know who you are, but I am not afraid of you. I am telling you this because I am a Sioux and you have sung the war-song of my people. If you are a Sioux, it is good; we will lay aside our weapons and meet as brothers. I have finished."

For some moments there was no response, and White Otter watched carefully, for he feared treachery. Then he heard himself addressed in the Sioux dialect.

"I have listened to your words—they are good. I am a Sioux, and I sang the war-song because I intended to kill you. The Sioux do not greet each other with arrows. I will meet you with the open hand. I have spoken."

A few moments afterward the speaker walked to the edge of the timber and raised his right hand in token of friendship. White Otter instantly stepped from behind the tree and replied to the signal. Then each put his bow in its case and advanced into the open. They stopped several paces apart and looked searchingly into each other's eyes. Then White Otter offered his hand.

"You have taken my pony; it is good, for I know you are brave. I will ask you for it,

for my heart is peaceful toward you. I see you wear an eagle feather, and I know you are a warrior. I am White Otter, the son of Standing Buffalo, who has gone on the long trail, and the grandson of Wolf Robe, the war-chief of the Ogalala Sioux."

They clasped hands. Then the other lad replied to the greeting.

"What you say is good. I will give you your pony, for I see that you are a Sioux. I see that you wear the claws of the great bear, and I know you are a brave hunter. I am Sun Bird. My father is Rain Crow, the medicine-man of the Minneconjoux Sioux. I have heard my people talk about the great chief Wolf Robe."

Having offered the customary compliments and proclaimed their friendship with the hand-clasp, the lads returned to the ponies. Then White Otter disappeared into the woods, and returned with the buffalo robes. Sun Bird's eyes sparkled as he ran his fingers over the valuable pelt of the albino, and he complimented White Otter on his good fortune.

That night they sat beside the camp-fire and talked of their plans. Sun Bird said that he, too, was on a war journey. His

younger brother, Little Raven, had been carried away by the Pawnees, and Rain Crow had sent Sun Bird to rescue him. Then White Otter told his mission, and they agreed to combine against their hated enemies.

IV

A CROW WAR PARTY

AT sunrise the Sioux left the foot-hills and rode away toward the south. They kept a sharp watch for stray companies of horsemen, as they knew that the Blackfeet, the Crows, and the Kiowas all ventured into that country to hunt buffaloes. Sun Bird had seen a solitary horseman two days before, and, fearing that the unknown rider might have been a hostile scout, the lads determined to take every precaution.

At midday they stopped at a water-hole to rest the ponies. As they lounged in the grateful shade of a lone cottonwood White Otter asked Sun Bird how he had won the right to fasten an eagle feather to his scalp-lock. Sun Bird's eyes lighted with pride as he told the story.

"You have asked me how I became a warrior. We are brothers. I will tell you

about it. It was the time of growing things, the same as now. I went with my mother to the foot-hills to gather berries. There were many berries, and we were glad. We began to sing. Then I saw something moving in the bushes. 'Mother, be careful, there is a bear near you,' I said. But I was fooled. A Kiowa warrior rose up and shot an arrow at me. 'Run to the horses,' I shouted. Two more Kiowas came hurrying through the bushes. We got to the ponies, but the Kiowas killed my horse. I was shooting my arrows and shouting the Sioux war-cry. When my mother got on her horse I jumped up behind her. The Kiowas had no horses, but they ran very fast, and they kept shooting their arrows at me. After a long time we came in sight of our village and the people saw us. When the Kiowas saw the Sioux coming they became frightened and turned back, but I jumped from the horse and ran after them. Then the Sioux warriors came up and captured the Kiowas. That is how I became a warrior."

"It is good; you are very brave," said White Otter.

Then Sun Bird asked White Otter to tell

of his encounter with the bear. The story was scarcely begun, however, when they were startled by the sudden neighing of their ponies. A moment afterward they heard a chorus of wild yells, and as they sprang to their feet in alarm they saw a large war party riding furiously over a rise of the plain.

"They are Crows!" cried Sun Bird.

The enemy was almost upon them; there was not a moment to spare. Leaping upon their ponies, the Sioux lashed them into a furious gallop and raced away across the plain. The Crows began to shoot their arrows, but they were out of range, and the lads made no attempt to return the volley.

"To the mountains! To the mountains!" cried White Otter, as he turned his pony toward the west.

The piebald and the buckskin ran shoulder to shoulder, and the Crows urged their ponies to a killing pace in the hope of overtaking them. The mountains seemed very far away and the Sioux realized that the race would be a long one. They knew only too well the fate which awaited them if they were caught, and their hearts weakened as they glanced anxiously over their shoulders and

saw the foremost riders almost within arrow-range.

"The Crow horses are fast," said Sun Bird.

"Come, we will show them how the Sioux ponies can run," cried White Otter, as he urged the piebald to a fresh burst of speed.

Maddened by the sting of the heavy rawhide quirts, which the lads applied without mercy, the Sioux ponies increased their lead. The Crows did their utmost to close the gap, but their horses were unequal to the task, and at the end of the day, when the Sioux finally neared the mountains, their pursuers were far out of arrow-range.

The lads raced their exhausted ponies toward a narrow, cañon-like pass which led into a small circular basin entirely closed in by high, precipitous walls of rock. Once inside, they barricaded the entrance with boulders and transformed the place into an impregnable stronghold.

The Crows stopped out of arrow-range to hold a council. The odds had suddenly turned against them, and they realized that an attempt to storm the place in daylight might result in heavy loss. They determined, therefore, to postpone their attack until dark.

Having guessed the intentions of their enemies, the Sioux determined to take advantage of the delay. Therefore, while White Otter crouched behind the barricade to watch the Crows, Sun Bird made a hurried survey of the basin. He found that it contained a small spring and offered fair pasturage for the ponies, and the lads felt confident that they could withstand a siege. They realized that to reach them the Crows would have to enter the narrow pass two at a time, and they believed they could shoot them down with little danger to themselves.

"The Crows will wait until dark," said White Otter.

"We must watch," cautioned Sun Bird.

The Sioux realized that there was a possibility of their enemies stealing into the pass under cover of the night, and as twilight gave way to dark they redoubled their vigilance. Sheltered behind the boulders, they peered anxiously into the night, straining their ears to catch the slightest warning of danger. For a long time the stillness was unbroken, but the ominous quiet only added to their suspense. Then they heard something which aroused their suspicions. Be-

lieving that the Crows were about to make their attack, the lads fitted arrows to their bows and nerved themselves for the fight. They listened anxiously, and after a few moments they heard something moving cautiously toward the barricade.

"It is a scout," whispered Sun Bird.

White Otter rose to his knees and discharged his arrow. They heard a hurried pattering of moccasined feet, and they knew that they had driven off the first prowler. The incident banished all desire for sleep, and they remained awake through the balance of the night.

At daylight there was not a pony or a warrior in sight. The lads were astonished. They peeped cautiously over their breastwork, and found the vast plain apparently devoid of life. The Sioux were puzzled. Had the Crows really abandoned the siege? It seemed most unlikely, and the lads were suspicious.

"See, there is a warrior hiding in those bushes," whispered White Otter, pointing to a near-by clump of sage.

With the discovery, the whole clever ruse was exposed, and the lads laughed at the very simplicity of it. The Crows had left a few

warriors hidden in the sage, while the main company had ridden away in the hope of luring the Sioux from the pass.

"They have taken their ponies to a water-hole; they will return," said Sun Bird.

It was not long before his prediction was fulfilled, and the lads saw the riders cantering boldly across the plain. As they approached, the concealed scouts rose to their feet and hastened to meet them.

Then the Crows held another lengthy council. From their excited gestures it was evident that some of the warriors were in favor of attacking the pass without further delay. The majority, however, seemed opposed to this reckless proposal, and the Sioux commended their caution. Their satisfaction was short-lived, however, for several of the more impulsive warriors mounted their ponies, and raced toward the pass, brandishing their weapons and yelling fiercely.

"Be brave," said Sun Bird.

"I am a Sioux," replied White Otter.

The lads waited calmly for the horsemen to come within range. The Crows, however, were taking no chances, and when they got within bow-shot they disappeared behind

their horses, and galloped past, discharging their arrows from beneath the necks of their ponies. Their fusillade was harmless, and the Sioux reserved their arrows.

Once more the Crows gathered for a spirited discussion, and the lads wondered what the result would be. They were not long left in doubt. In a few moments a solitary warrior detached himself from the group and rode cautiously toward the pass. He wore a handsome war-bonnet and carried himself with the dignity of a chief, and the Sioux felt sure he was the leader of the war party. Then he began to address them in the sign language. He professed a friendly heart and asked the lads to come out and talk with him.

"He speaks with a double tongue; we must be cautious," warned White Otter.

"We will see what he says," replied Sun Bird.

As the lads made no reply the Crow apparently supposed them unfamiliar with his signs, and he addressed them in Sioux.

"You Sioux people, listen to the words of Spotted Dog, for he is a great chief, and he speaks with a single tongue. My heart is

friendly toward you. You are young men, but you are brave; it is good. If you will stop fighting and come out we will meet you as brothers. We will take you to our village and tell the people about you. We will dance the friendship dance and make you Crows. Then you can become great warriors. But I will tell you that the hearts of my warriors are black against their enemies, the Sioux. If you do not do this thing they will surely kill you. You have heard my words; think about them before you speak. I have finished."

For some moments the Sioux remained silent. Only the threatening flash of their eyes showed the wrath which was flaming in their hearts. They knew that the words of the Crow were false and that the whole deceitful speech was a trap to entice them to their deaths. But even had it been sincere they would have scorned the offer and chosen death in preference to traitorous disloyalty to their tribe. When their first fierce anger passed, therefore, Sun Bird rose boldly to his feet and delivered their reply.

"We have heard the words of Spotted Dog, and we know that he speaks with a double

tongue. Go back to your warriors and tell them that the Sioux laugh at them," he cried as he shot his arrow at the astounded Crow chief.

Having offered this daring insult the lads realized that they could expect no quarter. They knew that the siege would be maintained to the bitter end. To strengthen their courage they began to chant their war-songs and to taunt their enemies. They challenged the Crows to enter the pass and called them women.

As the second day neared its end, however, the Sioux realized that their predicament was becoming serious. They saw that their enemies were determined to starve them out, and they planned to escape at the first opportunity. The Crows had despatched hunters to find game, and at sundown they returned with an antelope. They broiled it in sight of the Sioux, and invited them to come out and partake of the feast. The hunters had also brought two buffalo-skin gourds filled with water, and as they drank they jeered the imprisoned lads, evidently unaware that the Sioux were in possession of the spring.

When darkness finally settled upon the

plain the lads began to discuss the advisability of attempting to steal from the pass. While they were talking, however, they heard the Crow war-cry ring through the night, and they knew that their enemies were rushing upon them under cover of the dark. Undismayed, they raised their voices in the Sioux battle-cry and filled the narrow pass with their arrows. Demoralized by the unexpected resistance, the Crows withdrew in disorder. For a time they contented themselves with yelling and shooting their arrows against the rocks. Then they relapsed into silence, but the lads knew that the attack would be renewed.

It was not long before another company of volunteers rushed into the pass, but the valiant young Sioux again repulsed them and drove them back to the plain. During the fight White Otter received an arrow in his shoulder, but he cut the flint from his flesh and made light of the injury. After the Crows had withdrawn, however, he hurried to the little spring to bathe the wound, while Sun Bird kept guard at the pass.

"Now I know what to do," said Sun Bird, when White Otter returned. "The Crows

fight on foot; it is good. They must leave their ponies out on the plain. I will crawl out of here and find them. Then, when the Crows make another rush, I will frighten away the horses. The Crows will run out of the pass when they hear their ponies galloping off. I will run around and shout, and they will say: 'The Sioux are here—run for your life.' Then you can escape with our ponies. Ride along the edge of the plain, and I will capture one of the Crow horses and follow you. It is the best thing to do."

"Your words are the words of a brave warrior," replied White Otter. "It is good; we will do as you say, but I will go with you."

"No, that would be foolish," declared Sun Bird. "One must stay here to bring out the horses. The Crows have sharp ears; they will hear us if we try to take the ponies away while they are watching. We must fool them. I will do what is in my mind. I have spoken it."

"It is the best thing to do," White Otter finally agreed.

Then Sun Bird went for the ponies. He muzzled them and brought them to White Otter.

"But if you fail to capture a Crow pony,

what then?" White Otter asked, anxiously, as Sun Bird was about to start upon his dangerous expedition.

"Then I will follow you on foot; go a safe distance and wait for me."

"The Crows may capture you."

"Then I will give the lonely call of the coyote," said Sun Bird.

"And I will follow the Crows until I set you free," White Otter declared, loyally.

"It is good—I will go."

They listened anxiously, but the great plain was still. They wondered whether the Crows were holding another council. Then, as the silence continued, Sun Bird climbed carefully over the barricade and disappeared into the night.

White Otter breathed a prayer to the Great Mystery for the safety of his friend. Then he fitted an arrow to his bow, and waited in weary suspense. As the moments passed, and the quiet continued, he believed that Sun Bird had reached the plain. He knew that, once in the open, the lad would have little difficulty in avoiding his enemies. Then, to deceive any prowlers who might be within earshot, White Otter began to talk.

He was interrupted by the sound of stealthy footsteps close to his shelter. His first thought was that Sun Bird, having found the way blocked, was returning. Fearful of mistaking his friend for an enemy, he withheld his arrow. He dared not call lest he should advise the Crows that his comrade had left the pass. When the unseen prowler gave no sign White Otter knew that it was not Sun Bird, and he prepared himself for the final assault.

A moment later the Crows attacked the pass, and White Otter realized that this time they were determined to reach their enemies. He fought furiously, but the Crows were not to be driven back. They were almost upon him and the lad became desperate. He wondered what had happened to Sun Bird. Why did he delay? Perhaps he had been killed. The thought drove White Otter into a fury. He saw a warrior climbing recklessly over the barricade, and he drove his arrow through him. The Crow fell back, but a comrade appeared behind him. They were forcing the pass. White Otter knew that it was only a matter of moments until they would overwhelm him. Still he determined to fight to the end. Foot by foot he was

forced back toward the basin. Then, as the Crows rushed forward to annihilate him, he heard the Sioux battle-cry echo across the plain, and an instant afterward the thunder of galloping horses.

Believing themselves trapped, the Crows became panic-stricken. They heard their ponies racing away in a wild stampede, and they also heard the war-cry of their enemies ringing out in various parts of the plain. Thoroughly demoralized, they rushed from the pass and scattered in all directions.

Aware that his opportunity was at hand, White Otter kicked a hole in the barricade, and sprang upon the piebald. Then he galloped the ponies from the pass, and retreated along the edge of the plain. As he rode he raised the piercing battle-shout of his people. He heard Sun Bird yelling a short distance behind him, and he slackened his pace. Then he heard the thud of hoofs, and Sun Bird galloped beside him on a fiery little pinto. Realizing that the third pony would only be a hindrance, he turned it free, and rode away on the buckskin.

"You have done a brave thing; we will escape," said White Otter.

"Yes, we will escape," laughed Sun Bird. "I have sent the Crow ponies across the plain, and the Crows are running like frightened rabbits. But the warrior on guard escaped on his pony. He will bring back the horses, but we will be far away by that time."

When they were out of hearing of their enemies the Sioux turned from the mountains and raced across the plain. They rode until daylight, and then they took shelter in a grove of cottonwoods beside a small stream.

V

A LOSS RETRIEVED

THE lads knew that when the Crows eventually recovered their ponies they would begin a determined pursuit. Therefore, the anxious young Sioux soon left the cottonwoods and continued their flight across the plain. As they rode they glanced uneasily behind them, expecting to see their foes gallop into view at any moment. However, as time passed and the Crows failed to appear the lads began to hope that they had eluded them.

The day was drawing to a close when Sun Bird saw something far away to the west which caused them to stop their ponies and watch anxiously. After Sun Bird's first short glimpse of it, however, the mysterious object had disappeared behind a swell of the plain, and although the lads waited some time it failed to reappear.

"Perhaps it is a wolf," said White Otter.

"No; there is a scout hiding behind that ridge," declared Sun Bird.

"How do you know this thing?"

"My eyes have told me about it. A wolf does not hide when the hunters are far off," replied Sun Bird.

"It is true. Perhaps it is the Crow warrior who was guarding the ponies. I believe he has followed us. Come, we will go over there and fight with him," White Otter proposed, fearlessly.

"No, that would be very foolish. Perhaps it is not a Crow. There may be many warriors hiding behind that ridge," cautioned Sun Bird.

"Your words are good. We will be very cautious."

"Yes, my heart tells me there is danger."

The lads rode on, keeping a sharp watch for their foes. They feared that they were followed, and the thought caused them much concern. However, as they saw nothing to strengthen their suspicions, at sunset they stopped for the night beside a little pool. They concealed their tiny fire in a shallow depression of the plain, and after they had

broiled some buffalo meat they extinguished the embers with handfuls of earth. Then they picketed the ponies close at hand, and sat down to watch until dark.

When darkness finally settled upon the plain the Sioux increased their vigilance. They sat beside each other in silence, listening for a sound which might warn them of an impending attack. At last they rose and circled cautiously about their camp site. Then, having failed to discover any foes lurking in the vicinity, they felt somewhat more at ease. However, they determined to take every precaution, and they decided that one should watch while the other slept.

"It is the best thing to do," said Sun Bird. "I will watch near the ponies."

Some time afterward White Otter was roused from a heavy slumber by the pressure of his friend's hand. He was rubbing the sleep from his eyes when the lads were startled by the snorting of the ponies. At the sound Sun Bird turned and disappeared into the night, and White Otter sprang to his feet and followed him. But before they had gone ten paces they heard the ponies galloping wildly across the plain to the accom-

paniment of wild shouts of triumph. Realizing that they had been outwitted, the dismayed young Sioux stopped short and looked hopelessly into each other's eyes.

"We are like foolish papooses," Sun Bird cried, bitterly.

"Yes, we are like cackling old women," declared White Otter.

Once again the unknown foe sent his war-cry ringing through the night, and the Sioux noted that he rode toward the east. They believed that he was alone, and their hearts burned with wrath as they realized how easily he had gained his victory.

"I believe it is a Crow," said White Otter.

"No, my heart tells me another thing," replied Sun Bird. "I believe that warrior is a Kiowa."

Sun Bird said that he had often heard his father tell about a large Kiowa village, which was two days' travel east of the great mountains. As the horseman had ridden away in that direction, Sun Bird felt sure that it was a Kiowa who had stolen their ponies.

"I believe it is so," said White Otter.

The lads realized that they were in a serious predicament, and they were depressed and

disheartened. They knew that it would be folly to attempt to continue their journey on foot, and they sat down to plan a way out of the difficulty. They felt quite sure that the victorious scout would return with a war party in the hope of overtaking them before they reached the mountains, and they realized that they must act quickly to save themselves.

"We must find the Kiowa camp," declared White Otter. "Then we will wait until we see our ponies. When it is dark we will take them away."

Sun Bird instantly agreed to the plan, and as they were anxious to take advantage of the night the daring lads immediately set out upon their perilous mission. Aware of the folly of trying to find the trail of their foe in the dark, they wasted no time in the attempt, but traveled toward the east, with the stars to guide them. They hurried along at an exhausting pace, for they knew that they might be forced into hiding at daylight.

"The Kiowas will look for us near the mountains. They will not find us. No, we will hide near their village," said Sun Bird.

"You are as wise as the fox," declared White Otter.

When darkness at last gave way to dawn, the lads advanced with greater caution, for they knew that it would be fatal to be discovered on the open plain in daylight. At sunrise they stopped, and looked anxiously about them for some trace of the Kiowa camp. As they saw nothing to give them a clue to its location they were undecided which way to go. However, the plain seemed to offer more shelter toward the east, and they finally determined to continue in that direction.

"The Kiowas are our enemies; we must be as watchful as the eagle," said Sun Bird, as they hurried along.

They scouted carefully throughout the day, but were unable to locate the Kiowa camp, and as the sun finally sank below the western horizon they began to lose hope. The lads were soon roused, however, by the sight of a dust-cloud which rose behind a long, undulating swell of the plain to the south of them. Believing that it was a warning of danger, the Sioux took shelter in a heavy stand of timber, and watched the alarming signal with much anxiety. It was not long before a company of horsemen appeared on the crest

of the ridge, and the lads' hearts bounded at sight of them. Then, as the riders galloped their ponies toward the trees, the Sioux turned to each other in despair.

"It is the war party!" cried White Otter.

For an instant the lads thought of dashing recklessly across the plain, but a moment's deliberation convinced them that such a manœuver would be mere folly. They realized that it would be impossible to escape from their mounted foes except by stratagem, and they decided to remain in the grove.

"We must hide like the squirrel," said Sun Bird.

"Yes, I believe it is the only thing to do," agreed White Otter.

As the riders drew near, the lads climbed to the top of a large aspen and concealed themselves in its dense foliage. A few moments later the horsemen came within bow-range and stopped to talk. The Sioux counted them; there were fifteen. After a short discussion the riders separated into two parties and cantered slowly about the grove.

"They are Kiowas," whispered Sun Bird.

Having identified the horsemen, the Sioux felt sure that this was the war party which

had been sent to find them, and their eyes flashed angrily at the thought. They knew that the warrior who had stolen their ponies was in the company, and they would have given much to have been able to recognize him. In the mean time the riders had sent two scouts into the grove to reconnoiter. A hasty search convinced these warriors that the place was free from enemies, and they went to the edge of the plain and called their companions.

A short time afterward the Kiowas proceeded to make their fire within bow-length of the very tree in which the lads had taken refuge. The Sioux were filled with despair. This unexpected manœuver not only ruined all chance of escape during the night, but it threatened the lads with exposure as well. They knew that if the Kiowas made a large fire the glow from the flames would illuminate the top of the tree and make them conspicuous targets for Kiowa arrows. Therefore, as the Sioux heard the first sharp crackle of the igniting wood, and smelled the smoke ascending among the branches, they feared that discovery was but a matter of moments.

The Kiowas, however, were content with a

small fire before which they broiled their buffalo steaks, and the lads were much relieved. They peered cautiously down through the leaves and saw their enemies seated in the ruddy glow from the flames. They were eating heartily, and the Sioux believed that they had ridden a full day's journey from the Kiowa camp. The lads wondered whether these warriors would resume their search the following day or whether they would return to the village. The Kiowas were talking earnestly, but, unfortunately, the Sioux were unfamiliar with the dialect. Then one of the warriors thrust a stick among the embers, and a shower of sparks soared up through the leaves of the aspen. A dozen bronzed faces were upturned to watch them, and the lads shrank back, fearing that they had been discovered. A hush had fallen upon the little company of warriors at the base of the tree, and the Sioux waited in torturing suspense for a volley of arrows to tear their way through the fragile shield which screened them from their foes. The moments seemed endless until the conversation was resumed. Then the lads realized that they had escaped detection, and their fears subsided.

"It is good; the Kiowas have eyes like a very old man," whispered White Otter.

"Perhaps their ears are sharper than their eyes," Sun Bird cautioned him.

The lads remained in the tree throughout the night, and at daylight they saw the Kiowas mount their ponies and ride away toward the west. The Sioux waited some time after their enemies had disappeared over a rise of the plain before they finally descended to the ground. Then they left the grove and hurried away toward the south.

At midday the lads saw smoke rising against the sky, and they believed that it came from the Kiowa village. Soon afterward they crawled cautiously to the summit of a low ridge and discovered the camp. It was located in the timber on the bank of a stream. Judging by the number of lodges, the Sioux believed that the tribe was an important one. Then they transferred their interest to a large herd of horses which were grazing within a short distance of the village. The lads studied them with much interest, hoping to recognize their own ponies among the number. However, they found it impossible to

distinguish the animals at the distance, and, besides, they believed that the captured ponies would be exhibited in the camp. As they watched they saw many people moving about near the lodges, and a number of old women far out on the plain gathering herbs. The lads saw that it would be impossible to approach the camp from where they were without being discovered, and they wondered how they might locate the ponies.

"We will cross the stream. Then we will hide in the timber and watch the camp," proposed White Otter.

"Yes, I believe it is a good thing to do," agreed Sun Bird.

They made a long détour, and crossed the water far to the east of the Kiowa camp. Then they circled, and approached the village from the south. Once in sight of the trees which lined the stream the lads concealed themselves to watch and listen. Then, as they discovered nothing to arouse their fears, they made their way cautiously toward the water. They advanced until they were opposite the Kiowa horses, and then they stopped to reconnoiter. With only the width of the stream between them and the herd they soon

convinced themselves that the Sioux ponies were not with the other animals.

"My heart tells me that they are in the camp," said White Otter.

The lads crept carefully through the bushes at the edge of the stream until they were opposite the Kiowa camp. Then they heard voices behind them, and they fitted arrows to their bows and prepared to defend themselves. A few moments later two Kiowa hunters entered the stream less than an arrow-flight below the spot where the Sioux were concealed, and waded across to the village.

"We must be cautious; perhaps there are other hunters in the timber behind us," said Sun Bird.

"We will watch until we know about it," replied White Otter.

The sun had set and the day was ending. The lads watched the evening shadows settling upon the water, and their hearts filled with gloomy forebodings. They knew that to successfully carry out their undertaking they must locate the ponies before dark. Each moment, therefore, was precious, and they realized that delay would only make their task more difficult. Still, they were at

a loss to know just what to do. As they were discussing the situation they heard much loud talking and the neighing of ponies in the camp across the water.

"The war party has returned to the village," whispered White Otter.

Sun Bird nodded understandingly.

A few moments later they saw some boys driving the tired ponies out upon the plain. They also saw many warriors passing among the lodges. However, they were unable to see into the center of the camp, and as the twilight thickened the lads ventured from their hiding-place and crept cautiously to the summit of a brushy knoll which afforded them a splendid view of the village. Then they saw the two Sioux ponies tied before a lodge near one end of the camp.

The lads were planning a way to enter the village and run off the ponies under protection of the night when they were dismayed to see a tall, sinewy warrior emerge from the lodge and lead the ponies from the camp. The manœuver threw the young Sioux into a frenzy of despair. It was almost dark, and they realized that if the Kiowa turned their ponies into the herd it would be impossible

to recover them. They watched in breathless suspense, and were filled with wild delight when they saw the warrior picket his prizes within bow-shot of the village. When he returned to the camp the eager lads crawled through the undergrowth until they were opposite their mounts.

The Sioux realized that it would be foolhardy to attempt to reach the ponies before the camp quieted down for the night. However, as soon as it became dark the Kiowas made several large fires and began to dance and sing, and the lads knew that they were celebrating some important event. They saw the tall warrior who had taken charge of their ponies making a fiery speech to his people. From his gestures and the shouts of approval which greeted his remarks the Sioux believed that he was inventing a tale of thrilling heroism in connection with the capture of the Sioux ponies.

"He is telling his people about a terrible fight with the Sioux," White Otter said, scornfully.

"His mouth is braver than his heart," declared Sun Bird.

The night was far gone when the Kiowas

finally retired to their lodges. Then the Sioux heard the dogs prowling about the camp in search of food. The surly, half-starved beasts soon began to fight among themselves, and, as the turmoil increased, an old woman rushed from one of the lodges and drove them from the village.

"It is bad," said White Otter. "When we go over there they will tell the Kiowas that we are near the camp."

"No; when they make a great noise the people will say, 'The dogs are fighting over the bones.' Then they will not come out to look for us," replied Sun Bird.

When the fires had burned to embers and the camp was hushed in slumber the Sioux crept stealthily to the edge of the stream. They stopped a moment to listen, and then, as all was still, they waded carefully into the water. Realizing that the slightest sound might betray them to the dogs, the lads moved with great caution. As the bed of the stream was covered with small round stones, the Sioux were compelled to feel their way with much care. When they were half-way across they again stopped to listen. However, they heard nothing but the sleepy mur-

murs of the water, and, reassured by the stillness, they continued boldly to the opposite shore.

Once across the stream, the lads hurried toward the ponies. Keenly alert to their peril, they moved through the dark as noiselessly as shadows. The prize was almost within reach, and the thought set their hearts beating wildly. Still, they realized that each moment might bring discovery and death, and the possibility made them cautious. As they neared the ponies they drew their knives and advanced with every muscle set for instant action. They strained their eyes in an effort to pierce the dark, and at last they saw the ponies lying down a short distance ahead of them. As the lads approached, the suspicious animals rose to their feet and snorted nervously. A few swift strides brought the Sioux beside them. They severed the rawhide lariats which bound the animals to the picket stakes, and then they mounted and rode slowly away. Once beyond ear-shot of the camp, they urged the ponies into a gallop. They crossed the stream far out on the plain, and raced away in triumph.

"That brave warrior can tell his people another story about the Sioux," laughed White Otter.

"It is good," replied Sun Bird.

Having made their escape, the lads had little fear of being overtaken. They knew that the Kiowa would not discover his loss until daylight, and by that time the Sioux hoped to be far from the camp. Besides, the plain was hard and sun-baked, and they believed that their enemies would find it impossible to follow them. After the first wild sprint, therefore, they slackened the speed of their ponies and rode through the night in high spirits.

VI

CAPTURED

THE following day the Sioux again came in sight of the foot-hills, but as they still feared the Crows they kept to the open plain to avoid an ambush. Having exhausted their supply of meat, they began to look for game. For a long time they searched in vain. Then White Otter discovered several coyotes jumping about an animal at bay.

"See, the wolves have caught something for us," he told Sun Bird.

The coyotes dragged their victim to the ground, and then, as the lads approached, the wolves fled across the plain. When the Sioux came closer a splendid black-tail buck struggled helplessly to rise. They saw that it had been pierced by several arrows. After killing it the lads cut the arrows from its body and examined them with much interest. They differed from their own in both pattern

and workmanship, and were similar to the one which White Otter had cut from his shoulder.

"They are Crow arrows," said White Otter.

"It is bad," replied Sun Bird, glancing uneasily across the plain.

They knew that the buck had escaped from the foot-hills, and as its wounds were fresh the lads feared that their enemies were concealed in the timber. They watched the low wooded slopes a long time, but saw nothing to confirm their suspicions. However, they determined to take no chances, and Sun Bird kept guard while White Otter proceeded to skin and quarter the buck. Before the task was finished Sun Bird called him.

"We have been discovered," he said as White Otter joined him.

From the foot-hills to the west a straight column of black smoke rose against the sky. They knew that it was a signal, and they feared that they were trapped between two war parties. Then they saw another smoke signal rising above a wooded ridge to the east.

"The Crows have separated; we are in great danger," said White Otter.

"Yes; we must be very cautious," replied Sun Bird.

The smoke columns began to twist and break, and the lads knew that a message was being sent across the plain. They would have given much to be able to read it, for they believed it concerned themselves. They watched anxiously until the signals finally ended in spasmodic puffs of black smoke.

The Sioux were troubled. They believed that their enemies had set some clever trap, and they feared it would be difficult to escape. The plain was bare and shelterless, and they realized the folly of attempting to hide. They decided to continue boldly on their way in the hope of eventually stealing away under cover of the night. Therefore, when White Otter finally finished his task they rode slowly away, watching the foot-hills for a sight of their foes. As the Crows failed to show themselves, the lads believed that they were riding cautiously through the timber. They hoped to fool them by feigning a careless indifference. At the end of the day, therefore, they stopped at a small spring and made elaborate preparations for spending the night. Believing that they were being closely

watched, they picketed the ponies where the Crows would be sure to see them, and made their fire in the open.

"The Crows will laugh at our foolishness," said White Otter.

"It is good; they will learn that the Sioux are wise," replied Sun Bird.

When it was dark the lads began a cautious retreat. They had not gone an arrow-flight, however, before they heard the lonely wail of a coyote a short distance in front of them. They stopped and looked at each other in alarm. In a few moments the cry was repeated, and they felt sure it was a signal. Then, farther to the east, they heard an answer. Their courage weakened. They believed that the wily Crows had guessed their plan.

"We are surrounded," said Sun Bird.

As though to verify his words, a third signal sounded behind them. The Crows had found the camp-fire. The lads wondered if the west was still unguarded. They rode cautiously in that direction. Then they heard the wolf call directly ahead of them, and they stopped in dismay.

"We have been trapped," White Otter declared, savagely.

Their first impulse was to make a reckless dash for liberty, but a moment's reflection showed them the folly of such a manœuver. They believed that their enemies were closing in from all sides, and they knew that their only chance was to slip noiselessly past them in the dark. Fearing that their ponies might betray them, they muzzled them with buckskin. Then they rode slowly forward, at each stride expecting to find themselves face to face with their foes. The signals had ceased, and the lads knew that the Crows were close upon them. They stopped to listen. The plain was silent. Realizing that a moment's delay might prove fatal, they continued to advance.

"Listen!" whispered White Otter.

They heard subdued voices; the speakers were within bow-shot. Believing that they would surely be discovered, the lads prepared to fight. The Crows subsided into silence, however, and the Sioux wondered whether they had passed. Then a more alarming possibility suggested itself. Perhaps their foes were stealing upon them under cover of the dark. Alarmed by the thought, the lads peered anxiously into the night. A

few moments later they heard the sound of hoofs, and as their ponies raised their heads the Sioux struck them between the ears to prevent them from calling. The riders passed so near that for a moment the lads feared they had been seen. The horsemen continued on their way, however, and the Sioux realized that they had escaped detection. They waited until the Crows had passed from hearing, and then they continued their stealthy retreat.

The lads believed that they had slipped through the circle of riders. The thought gave them courage, and each stride forward strengthened their confidence. Again they had outwitted their enemies, and their hearts filled with pride. Then they heard a sudden outburst of yells, and they knew that their escape had been discovered.

"We are free," cried White Otter, as he lashed the piebald into a gallop.

"We shall be followed," replied Sun Bird. "We must ride fast."

The noise suddenly ceased, and they knew that the Crows were racing after them in grim silence. They had little fear of being caught, however, for they knew that their

pursuers were at a loss to know which way they had gone.

"They will look for us in the foot-hills," said White Otter.

"It is good; we will keep to the plain," replied Sun Bird.

They saw nothing more of their enemies until long after sunrise. Then as they stopped to rest the ponies, they saw smoke rising against the eastern sky. The plain had widened, and the foot-hills were far away, and the Sioux felt little anxiety. They doubted that their foes could see them at the distance, and, even if they could, it would be impossible to approach without being seen. As the smoke finally faded out and there was no answer the lads believed that the main body of their pursuers had abandoned the chase. Quite exhausted by two nights of peril, they determined to take advantage of the opportunity, and one slept while the other watched. They loitered until the sun was low in the western sky, and then, thoroughly refreshed, they mounted their ponies and rode away.

That night they camped on the open plain. They made a tiny fire between two large boulders and sat beside it to talk of the

events through which they had passed. They were enthusiastic over their success, and they hoped to be equally fortunate against the Pawnees. The lads talked until the fire began to burn low, and then Sun Bird rose to look for fuel. Taking his weapons, he disappeared into the dark, and White Otter stretched himself by the glowing embers to await his return.

Sun Bird had not gone twenty paces when he was suddenly struck down from behind. When he recovered consciousness he found himself upon his back with his arms tightly bound behind him and a rude buckskin gag in his mouth. A warrior knelt and peered fiercely into the lad's face, and Sun Bird recognized him as a Crow. A few moments later his captors removed the gag and pulled him to his feet. Then they led him to the fire.

Sun Bird saw White Otter, with his arms bound behind him, standing in the center of a group of Crows. His eyes met those of his friend, and there was a warning in the glance. He believed that for some reason White Otter wished him to remain silent. The Crows crowded about their youthful prison-

ers, jeering and trying to intimidate them. The young Sioux were no cowards, however, and they treated the threats with scorn, and looked their enemies fearlessly in the eyes.

Then a tall, broad-shouldered warrior, whom the lads instantly recognized as the chief who had addressed them at the pass, pushed his way through the circle and confronted them. For several moments he stared at them in silence, and they saw the light of triumph shining in his eyes. Then he began to taunt them. The lads remained silent, however, and when he found his stinging sarcasm of no avail he turned away and left them to the care of several evil-looking guards.

A few moments later the Crows seated themselves about the camp-fire and proceeded to hold a council. The Sioux watched them anxiously, for they feared that their lives depended upon the verdict. They had little doubt that most of the company were in favor of killing them at once. Their one hope was the chief. He was talking excitedly in the Crow dialect, and they were unable to tell whether he spoke for or against them. They believed, however, that he

would endeavor to take them to the Crow village to prove his ability as a war leader. The lads glanced searchingly at the four warriors who guarded them. They wondered whether they understood the Sioux tongue. White Otter planned to test them. He spoke to Sun Bird.

"See, the men who guard us have lost their knives," he said, craftily.

Three of the Crows only turned their heads and glared threateningly because he had spoken; the fourth warrior swept his hand to his knife-sheath. The trick had been successful, and White Otter had learned what he wished to know. Aware that one of their guards understood the Sioux dialect, the lads determined to remain silent. The warrior whom they had duped watched them closely for several moments, but their indifference allayed his suspicions and he believed that he had misinterpreted their words.

When the Crows finally ended their talk and the chief rose and walked toward them the lads knew that their fate had been decided. All eyes were turned upon them, and they waited with well-feigned indifference, for they were determined to uphold the tra-

ditions of their tribe. Spotted Dog spoke a few words to their guards and then turned away. The warriors were spreading their robes upon the plain. The lads' hearts filled with hope, for it was evident that they were to be spared until they reached the Crow camp.

The Sioux passed a restless night, for their captors had twisted their arms awkwardly behind them and had tightened the rawhide thongs about their ankles until their legs became stiff and numb. Each moment increased their misery. They were unable to comfort each other, for two alert guards slept between them. Several times these warriors rose on their elbows and peered into their faces. Then the lads closed their eyes and pretended to be asleep.

At dawn the Crows freed them from their bonds and ordered them to rise. They attempted to obey, but their cramped legs collapsed beneath them. Their captors laughed boisterously, and the Sioux struggled heroically to their feet. They suffered intensely, but they concealed their agony, and walked to the fire with the stolid stoicism of hardened veterans.

The horses were brought in, and the Sioux were mounted on their own ponies. Then, to their dismay, they saw that the Crows intended to separate. They realized that the warriors belonged to different villages, and they feared they were to be parted. The thought filled them with despair, for they had doubts of ever meeting again. They believed that death awaited them at the end of the journey, and they realized that each of them must face it alone. For a moment their eyes met, and each found encouragement in the glance. Then the Crows divided into two parties and the lads bade each other farewell. The riders who went toward the east took White Otter, and Spotted Dog and his warriors carried Sun Bird into the north.

VII

IN THE CROW CAMP

AFTER two days of hard travel White Otter and his captors entered the Crow village. The people crowded eagerly about them to see the prisoner. When they recognized him as a Sioux they began to taunt and threaten him. Then the leader of the war party ordered the lad to dismount. As he slid to the ground several boys ran forward and counted coup upon him by striking him with their hands. He was jeered and laughed at by the old women, and one old squaw began to beat him with a stick. Then a tall warrior pushed through the circle and ordered the people to stand back. White Otter saw at once that this man was a person of authority, and he believed that he was the head chief of the village. He looked searchingly into the lad's face, and then he turned to the leader of the war party. The latter

spoke to his warriors, and two of them stepped forward and led White Otter away.

He was escorted to a lodge near the center of the camp. It was unoccupied, and when he had entered his guards threw him to the ground and bound him. Then they withdrew.

Left to himself, White Otter began to speculate upon his chances. He believed that death was inevitable, but he found it hard to become reconciled. Still, he could think of no way to escape. He struggled to loosen the thongs about his hands and feet, but a few moments of exertion convinced him that his efforts were vain. His situation appeared hopeless. He realized that at any moment he might be called out to meet his doom. He heard some one talking in a loud tone, and he believed it was the leader of the war party. The day was almost at an end, and the lad wondered whether they would spare him until the morrow. The question brought Sun Bird into his mind. His heart filled with dread at thought of him. He feared that he had already paid the penalty. Then his gloom was lighted by a ray of hope. Perhaps Sun Bird had escaped! His heart leaped at the possibility. White Otter knew,

if his friend was free, that he would endeavor to find him. However, the hope was too forlorn to build upon, and he banished it from his mind.

Then a warrior entered the lodge. Behind him came an old squaw with meat. The Crow freed the lad's hands and sat beside him. The squaw gave him the meat and went out. When White Otter had finished eating she returned with water in a buffalo-hide receptacle. He drank heartily. Then the Crow bound his hands and followed the old woman from the lodge.

After they had gone White Otter reflected upon their visit. It had strengthened his hope, for he believed if he were to be killed that night that the Crows would not have sent food and drink to him. The thought was particularly reassuring just at the moment, for daylight was fading and the lodge was already dark. He heard the people breaking sticks, and then he saw the fire-light flickering on the walls of the lodge. It filled him with a vague premonition of danger. As the glow grew brighter White Otter believed that the Crows were preparing for a ceremony. He wondered if he would have a

part in it. The thought tested his courage. He had heard old Yellow Horse, the Sioux medicine-man, tell harrowing tales of the tortures which these people had inflicted upon him, and White Otter feared that he, too, was about to pass through the experience. Then he heard the monotonous beat of a war-drum. It was the summons to assemble. His heart pounded wildly. The Crows were shouting and laughing. He wondered if they were gathering to witness his death. Then the din ceased and the lad listened apprehensively. Some one was making a speech. When the speaker finished the Crows raised a shout which sent a shudder through the youthful prisoner. He believed that his end was near. The thought unnerved him and he struggled furiously against his bonds. The effort was useless. As he realized his helplessness his courage returned, and he waited calmly, for he was determined to die like a man.

The lad's suspense was soon ended, for two warriors entered the lodge and removed the thongs from his ankles. They drew him to his feet and took him outside. His appearance was the signal for a new outburst of yells.

The Crows had worked themselves into a frenzy, and White Otter saw that he could expect no mercy. His guards hurried him toward the fire and bound him to a stake which had been driven into the ground a short distance from the flames. The warriors formed a circle around him. Then the leader of the war party came forward with the man whom White Otter took to be the head chief of the village.

"Mountain Bear, the great Crow war-chief, does not speak your tongue, and I will tell you what he says," said the younger man. "He says that the Sioux declare themselves brave. He says that you are a Sioux. He says if you are brave he will believe the Sioux words. I have spoken the words of Mountain Bear."

For a moment White Otter regarded him in silence. Then, as the Crow war-chief seemed to expect an answer, the lad made reply.

"I have listened to the words of Mountain Bear. It is good that he has come to a Sioux to learn how to be brave," he said, sarcastically.

The leader of the war party translated the

words to his chief. Mountain Bear smiled contemptuously, and then he turned to address his warriors. His words seemed to rouse them to a fury, and at the conclusion of his harangue they began to shout and dance wildly about the captive. As they passed the stake each dancer struck the Sioux with his open hand. The lad gave no indication that he felt the blows. Then they drew their knives. They pretended they were about to drive them into his heart, and made violent passes within a few inches of his head. Then two warriors stood before him and fitted arrows to their bows. They aimed at his breast, and White Otter smiled scornfully. As they released the bowstrings, however, they twisted their wrists, and the arrows sped past on each side of him. Then a diabolical-looking old squaw came toward him with a brand from the fire. She held it close to his eyes, but White Otter laughed at her. This enraged her, and she would have thrust the fire into his face had not the chief snatched the stick from her grasp and pushed her from the circle.

At last Mountain Bear spoke to the leader of the war party, and the latter again ap-

proached the prisoner. He stopped a pace in front of him and drew his knife. White Otter looked fearlessly into his eyes. He wondered if the Crow had been commissioned to kill him. A moment later the warrior stooped and cut the thongs which bound the lad to the stake. Then he led him back to the lodge.

White Otter was amazed at his unexpected deliverance. He had expected to be killed, and he could scarcely realize that he had survived the experience unharmed. He wondered whether Sun Bird had been as fortunate. The lad still believed that the Crows intended to kill him, and he was at a loss to understand why they had delayed his execution. He was too overjoyed at his escape, however, to waste time trying to solve the riddle. He realized that he must spend the time he had gained endeavoring to form a plan for escape. Once free from his bonds, he believed that it would be an easy task to slip from the Crow camp. But he had been skilfully bound, and his efforts to free himself were futile. At last, thoroughly fatigued in brain and body, the discouraged lad fell asleep.

He awakened with a start. Then he raised his head and listened anxiously. Something was moving stealthily around the lodge. White Otter instantly became suspicious. He believed that some one was trying to find a way into his prison. That the prowler wished to avoid detection was evident. Perhaps Sun Bird had escaped and had trailed him to the Crow camp. That was the first thought which flashed through his mind. He waited for a signal which would tell him that his hope was true. Then the sound ceased, and White Otter wondered whether the unknown visitor had entered the lodge. He peered intently into the dark, but saw nothing. Then he again heard the noise. He told himself that if it were Sun Bird he would already have advised him of his presence. Then a more startling possibility entered his mind. Perhaps one of the war party had determined to wreak a personal vengeance upon him. The idea was alarming, for White Otter realized that he was powerless to defend himself. He might escape by calling out, but he preferred to die rather than ask aid from his captors. He waited calmly for his enemy to appear. The

sounds were now at the back of the lodge. A few moments later he heard the mysterious visitor crawl beneath the lodge-cover. White Otter struggled to a sitting posture. He strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of the intruder. Something was moving along close to the ground. He believed that whoever had entered was creeping forward to kill him with one blow. For a brief moment he was tempted to make an outcry, but his pride stifled the impulse. Then, as he identified the intruder, he started in surprise. The next instant he broke into a nervous laugh—his visitor was a dog. When it saw him it drew its tail between its legs and slunk through the door of the lodge.

White Otter remained awake through the balance of the night. Soon after dawn the robe over the entrance of the lodge was drawn aside and the leader of the war party entered. Behind him followed the old squaw with meat and water.

"What the dogs will not eat we give to the Sioux," the Crow said, contemptuously.

White Otter allowed the insult to pass unanswered, for he knew that it might prove fatal to further antagonize his foes. His

arms were stiff and numb, and it was some time before he could raise his hands to his mouth. The Crow watched him closely, evidently aware that each movement increased his agony. The courageous lad gave no outward sign of his suffering, and when he had finished eating he crossed his wrists behind his back and waited for the warrior to bind him. The Crow performed the task with much severity. He tightened the thongs until the rawhide cut into the flesh, but the lad bore it unflinchingly. When he had finished the warrior rose and looked upon his victim. The Sioux met his gaze with fearless eyes, and the Crow laughed and passed out.

At midday he returned with Mountain Bear. As the lad saw them enter the lodge his heart filled with dismay. He believed that he was to be subjected to another trying ordeal. The Crows approached in silence and the leader of the war party knelt and freed the prisoner from his bonds. Then Mountain Bear motioned for him to rise. White Otter made several unsuccessful attempts to obey, but his legs seemed to have left his body. He looked at them in sur-

prise. Then the blood began to flow through the congested veins and the pain became intense. The Crows were watching him and he attempted to conceal his suffering. At last he got to his feet. For an instant a wild hope filled his heart. Perhaps they intended to give him his freedom. Mountain Bear went to the door of the lodge and beckoned to White Otter. The other warrior walked close behind him.

The lad was escorted to the center of the village. He saw the entire tribe assembled before the lodge of the chief. The silence aroused his suspicions. Several old women came forward to threaten him, but Mountain Bear drove them away. Then the chief made a speech. White Otter would have given much to know what he said. When he finished, some of the older warriors talked. The Sioux improved the opportunity to study the camp. He located the horse-corral, and his eyes flashed as he saw the piebald in the inclosure. Then his attention was diverted, for the leader of the war party was addressing the council. White Otter watched him with much anxiety. He believed that his words would have great influence upon

his audience. The harangue was a fiery one, and White Otter felt sure the speaker was narrating the details of the desperate fight at the pass. He feared that the Crow was inciting his comrades to vengeance. At the conclusion of his speech the old woman who had thrust the fire in the lad's face entered the circle. She pointed at the young Sioux, and launched forth into an excited tirade. From the attention she received White Otter believed that she was a medicine-woman. He knew that these women had great influence, and he feared the effect of her words. When she finally exhausted herself the warriors began to talk excitedly among themselves. At last they seemed to reach an agreement, and one of them rose and addressed the chief. Then Mountain Bear spoke to his interpreter, and the latter translated the words to the prisoner.

"The Crows say that you must die," he said. "Wild Crane, the Crow medicine-woman, says that the Sioux killed her son, Yellow Calf, and she cries for vengeance. It is good; the Sioux are our enemies. I have spoken the words of the great chief, Mountain Bear."

White Otter laughed scornfully. He swept his eyes over the men in the council circle, and then he fastened his gaze upon the Crow chief.

"Tell the great chief that I have listened to his words. I am not afraid to die," he said, proudly. "Tell him that it is good that the Crows are led by an old woman. Tell him that White Otter, the Sioux, laughs at him. I have finished."

When his words were interpreted Mountain Bear rushed at him and struck him to the ground. Then the leader of the war party bound his arms and hurried him to the lodge.

White Otter realized that he had sealed his fate. He knew that before the night passed he would be called out to pay the penalty for his insults to the Crows and their chief. After the warrior left him he made many futile attempts to loosen the thongs which bound his wrists. Then he thought of a way to escape the tortures which he felt sure would be inflicted upon him. He knew that the Crows would free his feet to lead him from the lodge, and he determined to make a reckless dash for liberty. Then they would shoot him down before he reached the cor-

ral, and his death would be swift and painless.

The lad changed his plan, however, as he saw the old squaw and a young brave enter the lodge with food and water soon after dark. He believed that the Crows had decided to spare him for still another day, and he determined to take advantage of the opportunity. He made careful note of the young warrior who accompanied the squaw. As the Crow stooped to free his hands the Sioux saw that his only weapon was a knife. When the old woman left the lodge, therefore, White Otter grasped the surprised Crow by the throat and threw him upon his back. He choked him into insensibility and then gagged him with a piece of buckskin cut from his leggings. In another moment White Otter cut the thongs which bound his ankles and began to rub the circulation into his legs. Then he crawled cautiously under the rear of the lodge.

Once outside, the Sioux hurried toward the corral. Shielded by the dark, he reached the piebald without being discovered. Twisting one of the rawhide thongs about the animal's lower jaw, he led the pony cautiously away.

The Crow horses were upon the plain, and White Otter knew that he could gain a big lead before his enemies began the pursuit. He struggled to the piebald's back, and rode away at a gallop. He was a long way out on the plain when he heard a wild commotion in the Crow camp. Aware that his escape had been discovered, the young Sioux turned his face to the stars and asked aid from the Great Mystery.

VIII

A BOLD RESCUE

HAVING escaped from his enemies, White Otter's first thought was of Sun Bird. He determined to find the camp to which he had been taken and learn if he were still alive. It seemed like a foolhardy undertaking, as he was without food or the necessary weapons to procure it. However, loyalty was the first law of the Sioux nation, and White Otter was not the sort to shirk his duty.

White Otter realized that to find Sun Bird he must return to the spot where they had been surprised by the Crows. He turned his pony toward the west, therefore, and rode until daylight. Then he took shelter in a scattered stand of willows. With the knife which he had taken from the Crow he made a rude bow and some arrows from sharpened willow sticks. Then he cut a strip from his rawhide belt and twisted it into a bowstring.

With these crude weapons he succeeded in killing several rabbits. He had left his fire-sticks at the camp site, however, and he was forced to eat his game uncooked.

At twilight of the second day the lad reached the spot where he had last seen Sun Bird. To his delight he found that the Crows had failed to discover his fire-sticks. Realizing that it would be folly to attempt to follow Sun Bird's trail before daylight, and fearing that the Crows might have guessed his plan and followed him, he made a wide détour, and spent the night in the bottom of a ravine, some distance to the west.

Failing to see anything of his enemies at dawn, he left his hiding-place and returned to the camp site. He soon discovered pony tracks leading toward the north. The trail was difficult to follow, as the plain was hard and sun-baked and the tracks were indistinct and far apart. However, White Otter worked it out step by step until he got an idea of the general direction taken by the riders, and then he hurried along at a brisk canter. Whenever he missed the tracks he circled until he found them, and then hastened on. At the end of the day he came upon the

ashes of a camp-fire, and he knew that the Crows had passed the night there. Well pleased with his progress, the weary lad stopped to rest.

White Otter's mind was filled with all sorts of alarming possibilities, and sleep was impossible. When he did doze he was disturbed by dreams of Sun Bird, and he preferred to remain awake. His greatest fear was that the Crows from whom he had escaped might have sent scouts to warn their distant tribesmen. In that event his mission would be in vain. He took hope, however, in the thought that his late captors might be unwilling to acknowledge that they had been outwitted and would withhold the news of his escape until they had exhausted every effort to find him.

Toward dawn White Otter was alarmed by the cry of a coyote far away to the east of him. He listened anxiously, wondering if it were another signal. Perhaps the Crows had followed him. His heart sank at the thought. As the call was repeated, however, he recognized it as genuine, and his fears subsided.

As soon as it grew light enough to see, the impatient lad mounted the piebald and hur-

ried away. For a long distance the trail was easy to follow, and then it faded out in a barren stretch of sage. He lost valuable time looking for it, but he finally picked it up some distance farther on and followed it until the end of the day.

Then the Sioux saw six horsemen riding toward the west. He hurried his pony into a shallow ravine and hid behind a boulder to watch them. Their appearance filled him with alarm. His first thought was that they were the scouts from the east. As he watched them, however, he began to have doubts. He asked himself why they had made the long détour to the north. As he pondered the question he became convinced that they were not the men he had supposed them to be. Then who were they, and what was their mission? White Otter believed that they were hunters returning to the very village he wished to find.

When the horsemen finally disappeared over a distant rise of the plain the lad led his pony from the ravine and followed them. Realizing his peril, he advanced with great caution, and when he again caught sight of them it was almost dark. He watched from

the summit of a low ridge until they passed from view, and then he rode after them. When darkness fell, and he saw no sign of a campfire, he felt sure the Crow camp was close by. Believing that the horsemen were riding straight for the village, White Otter chose one of the brighter stars for a guide and continued toward the west. At short intervals he stopped his pony and strained his ears to catch any stray sounds which would warn him of the proximity of the camp. The night-hush was unbroken, however, and the young Sioux kept on. He knew that he was exposing himself to great danger, but the thought of Sun Bird gave him courage.

At dawn White Otter concealed his pony in a clump of cottonwoods and crawled cautiously to a rise of ground to reconnoiter. Half-way between him and a ridge of foothills to the west was a line of willows marking a watercourse. His heart bounded at sight of them, for he felt sure that the Crow village was somewhere along that stream. Then he discovered a thin column of smoke rising above the tree-tops, and a moment later he saw the lodges.

The lad spent the day watching the Crow

camp. He saw several companies of horsemen ride away toward the foot-hills, and he believed that they were hunters. At sunset they returned, and White Otter was much relieved when they drove the ponies out upon the plain. It filled him with hope, for he believed that these people were unaware of his escape. Had they been warned, he felt sure they would have kept the horses under strong guard near the camp. The Sioux's eyes flashed as he realized the ease with which he could lead away one or more Crow ponies under cover of the night.

White Otter's first task, however, was to learn whether Sun Bird was in the camp. As soon as it was dark, therefore, he left the piebald in the timber and set out for the village. When he reached the willows he followed the stream until he saw the glow from the camp-fires. Then he stopped to listen. All was still. The lad turned his face toward the heavens and asked aid from the Great Mystery. Then he continued toward the camp. He had not gone far before he saw the dim outlines of a lodge looming up a short distance ahead of him. His heart beat wildly, for he realized that he was

almost at the edge of the village. He heard voices and the crackle of fires, and for a moment he hesitated. Then the desire to know Sun Bird's fate drove him on. Sinking to his hands and knees, he crawled to a patch of low bushes which afforded him a view of the camp.

The Sioux saw a group of warriors sitting about a large fire in the center of the village, and his eyes were quick to distinguish Spotted Dog, the Crow chief. The latter was talking quietly with an old man at his left. A short distance away two old women were broiling meat over the glowing embers of a cooking-fire. Between the fires a company of boys were practising a dance. Beyond them, a squaw was instructing some girls in the art of making moccasins. It was a peaceful scene, and the lad saw nothing to suggest that the camp contained a captive. If he were there, the Crows seemed to have entirely dismissed him from their minds. White Otter had expected to see them gathered in council. He had even feared that he might find them dancing the war-dance around his friend. The lad was perplexed, and his perplexity made him suspicious. Had they already decided the captive's fate? White Otter weakened at

the thought. Then he grasped at a shred of hope. Perhaps Sun Bird had escaped! The possibility electrified him. He prayed that it might be true.

A few moments later, however, Sun Bird appeared. He walked slowly forward in the company of two stalwart guards and seated himself among the warriors about the fire. Except for his dress, one might have taken him for a member of the tribe, for there was nothing to suggest that he was a captive. White Otter stared at him in amazement. He could scarcely believe his eyes. For one brief moment a sickening doubt entered his heart. Had Sun Bird pledged allegiance to the Crows? White Otter recalled the offer which the chief had made to them at the pass, and he wondered whether Sun Bird had accepted it to save his life. He weakened at the thought. The next instant he banished it from his mind. His confidence in Sun Bird's loyalty was too strong to be shaken by such an unjust suspicion, and he was ashamed of himself. White Otter was convinced that, whatever was the reason for Sun Bird's apparent freedom from restraint, it had not been earned by sacrificing his honor.

It was not long, however, before White Otter learned the answer to the riddle. Spotted Dog turned and spoke to the young Sioux, and Sun Bird immediately rose to his feet. For several moments he stood with his head thrown back, gazing at the sky. Then as the Crows began to beat their war-drums he crouched and began to dance. He went through all sorts of ridiculous contortions, and appeared to be rousing himself to a frenzy. As his excitement increased he danced to the fire and picked up glowing embers, which he appeared to hold against his flesh. It was a weird and unusual exhibition, and White Otter watched him in wide-eyed astonishment. Then he heard his voice rising shrilly in the Sioux medicine-song, and the true significance of the performance flashed into his mind. His eyes twinkled merrily as he realized that the Crows were again being duped.

White Otter believed that Sun Bird had succeeded in impressing the Crows with his importance as a medicine-man. Having learned some of the ceremonies from his father, he was using them to gain favor with his captors. As all the tribes considered it

unlucky to kill a person possessing mysterious powers, White Otter now understood why the Crows had spared Sun Bird. He knew, however, that the scheme was a dangerous one. The Crows were likely to put his powers to an impossible test, and if he failed his fate would be beyond imagining. It was evident, however, that the wily young Sioux was only using the ruse to gain time until he could find an opportunity to escape. He terminated the clever hoax with a lengthy speech to Spotted Dog, and White Otter feared that the Crow chief had actually consulted him upon some matter of importance. When the talk was ended his guards escorted him to a lodge at the edge of the camp. Then, having learned what he wished to know, White Otter withdrew to the plain.

He spent the following day watching the Crow village. He feared the arrival of scouts from the east with word of his escape, and he was nervous and anxious. If they arrived before dark he knew that his plan to save Sun Bird would be futile. As the sun finally neared the western rim of the plain White Otter began to hope. Believing that the danger had passed, he transferred his attention

to the band of ponies which were grazing some distance from the camp. They were too far away to enable him to identify the buckskin, but he had doubts that it was in the herd. He believed that the members of the war party had drawn lots for it, and he felt sure that the winner would picket his prize nearer the village.

As night finally closed down White Otter muzzled the piebald and rode cautiously toward the Crow ponies. He knew that it would be a waste of time to look for the buckskin, but he made a careful inspection of the herd. He passed by several horses which did not appear fit, and then he found one which suited him. It was a clean-limbed little roan, and even in the dark the lad's trained eyes detected evidences of speed and endurance. Dismantling his rude bow, he twisted the rawhide about the pony's lower jaw, and then he muzzled the animal and led it toward the stream.

When White Otter crawled to the edge of the camp he saw that something had upset the Crows. The warriors were gathered in council, and Spotted Dog was talking excitedly. For a moment White Otter's courage

failed him. He feared that they had learned of his escape. Then he guessed the truth—Sun Bird's hoax had been discovered. White Otter believed that they had put the lad's powers to the test. He was convinced when an aged warrior, whose dress proclaimed him a medicine-man, rose to his feet and began to talk. His words seemed to find instant favor, and it was evident that he was extolling his own powers and exposing the fraud of his rival. He roused himself into a great rage, and his voice rose to a shriek. The entire tribe gathered to hear him, and White Otter had little doubt that Sun Bird's fate was already sealed. When the medicine-man finally exhausted himself several warriors left the council circle and hurried toward the lodge in which the Sioux was confined.

White Otter was tortured by the agony of despair. Each moment increased his suspense. It was evident that he was about to see Sun Bird put to death, and he could think of no way to save him. His helplessness almost drove him mad. His first impulse was to rush boldly into the camp to die beside his friend. He realized, however, that such an action would be foolhardy, and he knew

that Sun Bird would disapprove the useless sacrifice. The distracted lad determined to remain in concealment, therefore, hoping that he might still find an opportunity to aid his friend.

Sun Bird's appearance forced a wild outburst from the Crows. The village was in an uproar as the unfortunate lad was brought before the chief. White Otter shuddered as he recalled his own experience. This time the Sioux's arms were tightly bound behind his back, and as he stood helplessly in the midst of the excited throng the old medicine-man ran forward and struck him a stinging blow in the face. Sun Bird showed no fear, however, and his splendid courage filled White Otter's heart with pride. Spotted Dog made a fiery speech, and from his tone and manner it was evident that he was reviling the calm-eyed youth who faced him. Sun Bird's scornful indifference inflamed the hysterical old medicine-man into such a temper that he pushed Spotted Dog aside and sprang at the lad to throttle him. The chief seized him, however, and thrust him from the circle. This act led White Otter to hope that the Crows might intend to delay the execution

until the following day. A few moments later Sun Bird was taken back to the lodge, and the agonized lad at the edge of the camp raised his face and gave thanks to the Great Mystery.

However, the Crows showed no inclination to end the council, and as he realized the hopelessness of attempting to rescue Sun Bird before the people retired to the lodges White Otter fretted at the delay. The children and most of the women had already disappeared, but the warriors appeared to have settled themselves for the night. Their actions worried him. He knew that an important council was often continued until daylight, and he feared that the Crows might prolong their discussion and rob him of his opportunity.

At last, when the night was two-thirds gone, the talk came to an end. White Otter's heart beat fast with excitement as he watched the warriors rise and disperse to the various lodges. His hopes collapsed, however, when two of the Crows entered the lodge to which they had taken the captive. Here was a difficulty which upset all his plans, for he had relied upon finding Sun Bird alone. Then

the warriors came out and went into the next lodge, and White Otter's eyes flashed with triumph.

When the camp was quiet the daring young Sioux hurried along the edge of the village until he came to the lodge occupied by Sun Bird. Then he drew his knife and wriggled under the rear of the tepee. Once inside, he called softly to his friend. The prisoner rose at the sound, and White Otter sprang to his side. It took but a few moments to free him from his bonds, and then the lads crawled from the lodge.

The Sioux went cautiously until they were an arrow-flight from the camp, and then they began to run. They reached the ponies in safety, and rode away at a gallop. When they were some distance out on the plain Sun Bird offered his hand to White Otter.

"You are a brave warrior," he said. "My heart is full of words which I cannot speak."

"We are brothers," replied White Otter.

IX

THE UNKNOWN HORSEMEN

IN spite of their successful escape the Sioux found themselves in a serious plight. The loss of their weapons and accoutrements was a severe set-back, and they agreed that it would be folly to continue toward the Pawnee camp until they had supplied themselves with a new equipment. White Otter's primitive bow was utterly useless for purposes of defense.

"We are as helpless as papooses," Sun Bird declared, bitterly.

"We are like an old wolf that has lost its teeth," laughed White Otter.

The lads realized that to properly equip themselves would consume several days, and they feared that the delay might be fatal. They had little doubt that the Crows would make a determined search for them, and they expected to see them ride into view at any moment.

"We will hide in the foot-hills until we are ready to fight," proposed Sun Bird.

"There is no other way; we will do as you say," agreed White Otter.

They turned their ponies toward the west, and at the end of the third day they reached the foot-hills. Then for several days they worked patiently at their task. Their only tool was the knife which White Otter had brought from the Crow camp, and they encountered many difficulties. They made their bows from ash, which they found growing on the crest of the ridge, and their arrows from smooth, straight branches of the red willow, which they procured in a sheltered ravine. Then Sun Bird discovered a small outcrop of flint, and they chipped it off and made it into arrow-heads. In the mean time White Otter had killed a deer, which furnished sinews for binding the flint to the willow shafts and with buckskin for bow-strings. They knew that to make the arrows fly true, however, they must have feathers, and another day passed before White Otter finally killed a hawk. Then the new weapons were tested. The first trials were discouraging; the arrows flew uncertainly and plunged

to the ground before they had gone half their course. The lads knew that they had made them too heavy at the point, and they unbound the flint and chipped it to a smaller size. Then they readjusted the feathers and tried again. This time they drove every arrow into the mark. Well satisfied with their new weapons, the Sioux left the foothills and resumed their journey toward the distant Pawnee camp.

At the end of the first day they surprised a small band of buffaloes drinking in a narrow ravine, and they killed two cows. Their coats were soft and silky, and the lads were much pleased with their success. They camped at the stream several days, scraping and washing the pelts, which they made into robes.

"The Great Mystery has returned what the Crows took from us," White Otter declared, reverently.

"It is good. He has heard our prayers; we will be successful," replied Sun Bird.

Having seen nothing of the Crows, the lads believed that at last they had abandoned the pursuit. They determined to take no chances, however, and each night one watched while

the other slept. They rode steadily toward the south, and as they found an abundance of game for themselves and plenty of grass and water for their ponies, they were in high spirits.

One morning as they were crossing a wide stretch of sage Sun Bird touched White Otter's arm and pointed to the west. They saw a heavy dust-cloud, and a short distance ahead of it a small bunch of antelope in wild flight. A moment later a horseman appeared. He discovered the Sioux, and turned to watch them. Then he dismounted and began to wave his robe. It was the signal for a talk, and the lads looked at each other in amazement.

"That man is either very brave or very foolish," declared White Otter.

"Wait; we will see who he is," replied Sun Bird.

Then he waved his buffalo robe slowly about his head. The horseman mounted his pony and began to approach them. Fearing a trap, the Sioux remained where they were. When they did not go to meet him the rider stopped and again waved his robe. Sun Bird replied to the signal. This time,

however, the horseman did not move. He waited a few moments, and then he wheeled his pony and galloped away. After he had disappeared over a rise of the plain the perplexed lads turned to each other for an explanation.

"It is bad," said Sun Bird. "He is a young brave. He is with a hunting-party. They have separated. He took us for his friends. He saw that we were cautious, and he became afraid. He does not know that we are Sioux, but he will tell this thing to his people. We must ride away from here. I do not believe he is a Crow. I do not know who he is. My eyes do not travel so far. Let us go."

"You speak wise words. I believe what you say," declared White Otter.

The Sioux rode away at a fast pace. They glanced uneasily over their shoulders, expecting to see a war party following on their trail. The ponies seemed to be about equally matched in speed, and Sun Bird found the little roan a worthy substitute for the buckskin. As they saw nothing to indicate that they were being pursued, the lads reined the animals to a walk. Shortly after midday

they came to a water-hole and they stopped to broil some buffalo meat. As they ate they discussed the actions of the lone horseman. They were still perplexed. Sun Bird's solution seemed to be the only plausible one, and yet the whole affair was a mystery. Although they spent some time rehearsing it, they were unable to reach a definite conclusion.

They were preparing to resume their journey when White Otter discovered a group of animals far away on the plain. He showed them to Sun Bird, and they studied them closely. For some moments they were unable to identify them.

"Antelopes are not so big when they are far away," White Otter said, dubiously.

"Buffaloes do not hold their heads so high," declared Sun Bird.

"They are ponies," cried White Otter.

"Your eyes are good; it is so," agreed Sun Bird.

"My grandfather has told me of wild horses which live on the plain near the Pawnee country."

"I, too, have heard of those animals," said Sun Bird. "But these ponies carry riders."

"Your eyes are better than mine, for I see nothing but the ponies," said White Otter.

"My eyes do not tell me this; I feel it in my heart," replied Sun Bird.

"Then I believe it is so," declared White Otter. "We will wait until we are sure."

The actions of the distant ponies strengthened Sun Bird's suspicions. After watching them some time they became convinced that the animals were being skilfully manœuvered by unseen riders. The ponies remained broadside to them, and they believed that each horse concealed a warrior. It was an old trick which the lads themselves had often practised when hunting. By crouching and walking close to the pony's shoulder it was easy to escape detection. As the band of horses made no attempt to approach, the Sioux lingered. They were curious to learn what the horsemen intended to do. They believed that they were attempting to decoy them within bow-range. Then one of the ponies suddenly wheeled and exposed the man behind it. The lads laughed heartily at his awkward attempts to hide himself. A few moments afterward the ponies disappeared, and it was evident that the strate-

gists realized that their ruse had been discovered.

"Come," cried Sun Bird. "We must ride away; they will circle around us."

They rode off at a brisk canter, watching sharply for the mysterious horsemen. As the day passed and they failed to appear, the Sioux believed that they had turned back. Their fears were revived, however, just before dark, when they saw a bunch of animals silhouetted against the sunset sky. They were far away, but the lads finally identified them as antelope. Then they found water, and made camp.

The next day they saw a range of giant peaks towering against the sky far to the south. Sun Bird said his father had told him of these mountains, and he declared that they were nearing the Pawnee camp. Shortly afterward they swam their ponies across a river, and White Otter said he recognized it as one which his grandfather had described. He told Sun Bird the Pawnee village was three days' journey from this water.

"Then we are already in the country of our enemies; we must be cautious," Sun Bird replied.

"We will be as watchful as the eagle and as cunning as the fox," said White Otter.

Toward the end of the day the lads discovered fresh pony tracks, and they stopped to examine them. They saw the marks of travois-poles mingled with the footprints of the horses, and they knew that the travelers were moving their lodges. As they were far south of the Crow country, and several days' journey to the west of the Kiowa hunting-grounds, the Sioux believed that these people might be Pawnees.

"We must follow them and find out who they are," said Sun Bird, after he had carefully studied the trail.

"It is the best thing to do," agreed White Otter.

The day was far gone, and they had little hope of coming within sight of the travelers before dark. For a short distance the trail continued toward the north, and then it turned to the west. The lads recalled that the unknown horsemen had also disappeared in that direction, and they began to think.

"Now I know this thing," said Sun Bird. "The warriors who hid behind those ponies are with this camp. They are hunters.

The young brave who took us for his people told them about us. They followed him, and then they saw us. They could not catch us. Then they rode away to tell the camp what they had seen. They will send a war party to look for us. It is bad."

"You have the wisdom of the old men; I believe your words," replied White Otter.

The lads followed the trail until dark, and then they left it and camped beside the river. They passed most of the night discussing the problem which confronted them. They realized that it might take several days to learn what they wished to know. First they must find the camp and ascertain whether the travelers were Pawnees. Then they must learn whether this was the main village, or whether the Pawnees had divided into two camps. The latter possibility caused them much anxiety. They realized that their task would be doubly difficult if the Pawnees had separated. In that event it might be necessary to visit both camps to find Little Raven and recover the Red Arrow.

"If the Pawnees are all together we shall find what we seek," said Sun Bird. "If they have separated, it is bad. If I do not find

Little Raven in this camp, then I shall seek the other village. I have promised to rescue my brother."

"It is good; we will do as you say. If I do not find the Red Arrow in this camp then I, too, shall seek the other village. I have promised to bring the trophy to my people."

At daylight White Otter killed two ducks, and after making a careful search of the plain the lads made a tiny fire of dry wood and broiled the birds over the embers. When they had finished eating they returned to the trail. They saw at a glance that nothing had passed over it since the day before, and they felt somewhat relieved. Soon after midday they came upon the remains of several camp-fires. As the ashes were cold, the Sioux knew that the travelers were at least a half-day ahead of them.

"They are traveling fast," said White Otter. "Their journey is a short one. I believe they are going to hunt buffaloes."

"It is bad; then we shall not find what we seek. But my heart tells me another thing. I believe it is a big camp. I see the signs of many lodges. I believe these people are

going to a council. They will meet all their people. It is good; we shall find what we seek."

At the end of the day, however, the lads had failed to discover the camp, and they were somewhat discouraged. They saw a cloud of dust, far away in the distance, and they believed that it came from the war party that had been sent to find them. Concealing their ponies in a ravine, they watched anxiously until the alarming signal faded from sight. Then they hurried along the trail. At dark they again made a détour, for they feared that scouts might return on the trail in the hope of trapping them.

"To-day we shall meet the war party; there is much danger," warned Sun Bird, as they set out at dawn.

"How do you know this thing?" demanded White Otter.

"An arrow fell from my hand and stuck in the ground. It is a warning. I have heard my father tell it, and I have heard the old men say it is so."

"Then we must be careful," White Otter said, solemnly.

The sun was only half-way to the meridian

when they came to the place where the travelers had spent the night. The ashes from the fires were still warm and the lads had hopes of coming in sight of the camp before dark. The possibility made them anxious, and they urged their ponies into a canter. They had not gone far, however, when they saw a company of horsemen galloping toward them from the north. The plain offered no cover, and the Sioux felt sure that they had already been discovered. Determined to take advantage of their lead, they turned their ponies, and raced away at top speed.

"It is the war party," said Sun Bird. "What I said has come true."

"It is so; the arrow has warned us," agreed White Otter.

The pursuit was not a long one, and the lads were never in danger. They maintained their lead without difficulty, and their foes soon abandoned the chase. The Sioux watched them ride away toward the west. They had been unable to identify them, but they believed that they were the same warriors whom they had encountered two days before. The lads were equally certain that they were members of the camp.

"They will tell their people that we are following the trail," said White Otter.

"We have been foolish to let them know this thing," replied Sun Bird.

The Sioux were troubled. They believed that they had blundered. Aware that they were being followed, the travelers would take every precaution against surprise, and the lads feared that it would be almost impossible to approach the camp without being discovered. However, they had no idea of abandoning the undertaking. Fearing that the horsemen might attempt to surround them under cover of the dark, they made a wide détour before they finally camped for the night.

The next day they returned to the river. They swam their ponies to the opposite shore, and then turned sharply to the west. For a long time they saw nothing of the travelers. Then, some distance ahead of them, they discovered a dust-cloud. The Sioux looked at each other in surprise. It was evident that the travelers had crossed the water. This was an unexpected manœuver, and the lads were unable to guess the significance of it. It was impossible to tell whether the

dust was raised by the main company of travelers or whether by the smaller company of scouts, for the riders failed to show themselves.

"I do not know this thing," said Sun Bird. "My heart tells me that we are in danger."

When they believed it was safe to venture from concealment they mounted their ponies and advanced with great caution. They saw nothing more until near the end of the day, and then they discovered something which sent a thrill through them. Peering cautiously over the crest of a low ridge, they saw two lines of horsemen slowly approaching each other. Farther to the west a great column of dust marked the hasty flight of the camp. The lads knew that there was to be a battle, and their eyes lighted with excitement. It was evident that the travelers had been pursued by a hostile war party. Believing that they were far enough away to escape detection, the Sioux determined to watch.

"See, the women and children are running away, and the warriors have turned to meet their enemies," said White Otter.

"It is bad," replied Sun Bird. "If my brother is with that camp he may be killed."

For a moment the possibility sobered them. Then the battle began, and every other thought was driven from their minds. They saw the opposing forces charge forward, and they heard the far-away cries of the fighters. Then all was smothered in a cloud of dust. A few moments later a company of horsemen dashed into view, wheeled, and charged back into the fray. Several riderless ponies galloped across the plain, and the lads knew that the first volley of arrows had been effective. Then their attention was attracted to a warrior on a white pony. He seemed to be wherever the fighting was fiercest. Each moment the Sioux expected to see him killed, but his very recklessness appeared to save him. His daring manœuvers roused the lads' enthusiasm.

"That warrior on the white horse is a very brave man," said White Otter.

"I believe he is a Pawnee," replied Sun Bird.

At that moment the white pony went down, and its daring rider rolled over the ground. He rose to his feet and several horsemen raced toward him. Apparently they were his friends, for he ran to meet them. His ene-

mies, however, were quick to take advantage of his distress, and four riders started in pursuit of him. He wheeled and brought the two foremost horsemen to the ground with his arrows. Then he leaped upon one of the riderless ponies and led his warriors in another reckless charge.

"I believe he is a medicine-person," declared White Otter in amazement.

"He fights like a Sioux," replied Sun Bird.

The sun had already set, and the twilight shadows were reaching across the battlefield. As neither side showed signs of yielding, the lads believed that the fight would continue until dark. They saw many riderless ponies galloping wildly about the plain, and they knew that many warriors had been killed. Then the intrepid leader executed a clever flank manœuver and threw his enemies into confusion. In another moment he had surrounded them, and his warriors charged furiously from all sides. A terrific hand-to-hand encounter followed. Then the enemy fled in wild disorder, with the victorious warriors in close pursuit.

The Sioux watched them vanish over a swell of ground far to the north. They dared

not leave their hiding-place, for they knew that the victors would return to the battle-field to carry off their dead and wounded. Just before dark the lads saw them returning with many captured ponies. The Sioux waited until the night was well advanced and then they mounted their ponies and rode to the river. They believed that the victors were Pawnees, and they determined to return to the scene of the conflict the following day to learn the identity of the vanquished war party.

"I am thinking about that man who rode the white pony," said Sun Bird.

"I believe he is a great war-chief," replied White Otter.

X

AN ALLIANCE WITH THE CHEYENNES

EAGER to learn the identity of the rival war parties, the lads returned to the battle-field at daybreak. As they rode cautiously over the ridge from which they had watched the conflict, they came upon the grim evidences of the tragedy. The dead ponies and the little company of lifeless warriors presented a depressing spectacle. The Sioux advanced slowly with bowed heads, singing the low, mournful chant which their people sang whenever a war party returned with the bodies of those killed in battle. They had been taught to look upon the dead with respect and reverence, and they performed the solemn ceremony with sincere emotion. They stopped beside the first lifeless form and gazed thoughtfully into the upturned face.

"It is a Cheyenne," Sun Bird said, soberly.

"They are brave warriors. They are friends of my people. I am crying in my heart."

It was the first time White Otter had seen these people, but he had often heard his grandfather speak of them. He knew that they had smoked the peace-pipe with several Sioux tribes, and he looked upon them as his brothers.

"This thing has brought clouds into my heart. These brave men whom we see lying here are our brothers. We must know who killed them," replied White Otter.

They rode silently about the battle-field, searching for a clue to the identity of the victorious war party, but all the dead were Cheyennes. Then the lads realized that the victors had carried off their warriors. Therefore, as they saw no reason for lingering at the dismal spot, the Sioux turned their ponies toward the west and hurried away. They had gone scarcely an arrow-flight, however, when White Otter brought the piebald to a sudden stop and pointed toward a clump of bushes a short distance away.

"There is a warrior hiding in those bushes. I saw his head!" he cried, excitedly.

"We will see," replied Sun Bird.

The lads advanced cautiously. Once within bow-range they sheltered themselves behind their ponies and rode slowly around the bushes. They saw no evidence of any one hiding there, however, and Sun Bird wondered if White Otter's sharp eyes had played him a trick. Then something moved. As they rode nearer, a warrior rose to his knees and attempted to shoot an arrow at them. He collapsed with the effort and fell into the bushes.

"He is wounded," cried Sun Bird. "I believe he is a Cheyenne."

The lads rode recklessly to the cover. As Sun Bird slid from his pony the wounded warrior made another futile attempt to defend himself. Sun Bird pulled the bow from his hand and threw him to the ground. Then White Otter dismounted and rushed to his friend's assistance. They recognized the man as a Cheyenne, and they attempted to convince him that they had no desire to harm him.

"We are Sioux; we will help you," said Sun Bird.

It was evident that the Cheyenne understood the words, for the challenge faded from

his eyes and he ceased to struggle. Then they released his arms and sat down beside him. One of his legs was useless, and they believed that he had been crushed beneath his pony. For a few moments he watched them in silence, his alert eyes noting every detail of their dress. At last he seemed to recognize them and his face showed relief. He was a young man of splendid physique, and the lads looked upon him with pity. He was very weak, and he appeared to be suffering. While they were deciding the first thing to be done, the Cheyenne attempted to speak. Then he fell back in a swoon.

"Come, we must carry this man to the water," cried White Otter.

They lifted him tenderly to the piebald, and White Otter mounted behind him. They rode very slowly, for they realized that every jolt increased the agony of the man they were endeavoring to assist. When they reached the river they placed him upon their buffalo robes. The sound of the water seemed to rouse him to consciousness, and he crawled forward and plunged his face into the icy current. It revived him, and he fell back upon the robes with a sigh of relief. He

closed his eyes, and the lads began to examine his injured leg. While they were at work, however, he raised his head and spoke to them.

"The Sioux are friends; they have good hearts," he said, weakly.

Overjoyed to find that he spoke their dialect, the lads began to ply him with questions. They learned that the travelers were Pawnees. He said they had surprised a party of Cheyennes, killing several warriors and running off a number of ponies. Then the Cheyennes organized a war party and pursued them, and the conflict which the lads had witnessed was the result.

Having learned this much, the Sioux asked him about the solitary horseman who had attempted to talk with them. They were surprised to learn that he was a young Cheyenne who mistook them for members of his hunting-party. Sun Bird smiled as he heard his conclusions verified. They also learned that soon afterward the Pawnees made their attack, and the Cheyennes supposed that the two unknown riders had led the war party on their trail. Then the lads told him of the company of horsemen who attempted to decoy them within range.

He said they were Cheyennes. He was positive, however, that the riders who pursued them the previous day were not his people. The lads felt confident, therefore, that those warriors were Pawnees.

"You have told the thing as it is," said White Otter, turning to Sun Bird.

They asked the wounded warrior how he had escaped. He said that in the thick of the fight his pony was killed, and in falling it crushed his leg. Unable to free himself, he feigned death. Then when the Pawnees rode away in pursuit of their foes he renewed his efforts. At last he succeeded, and crawled into the nearest cover. He hid until his enemies left the battle-field with their dead and wounded. Then he made many futile attempts to drag himself to the river, but he found the task hopeless. At daylight he saw the young Sioux, and, fearing that they were Pawnees, he crawled into the bushes to watch them.

"My people will return here before the next sun disappears," he said, confidently. "If you are on a fast journey give me some meat and leave me. I will tell the Cheyennes that the Sioux are their friends."

Although they realized that each moment's delay threatened the success of their plans, the lads refused to desert him. They believed that it was their duty to remain with him until his people arrived. And if the Cheyennes failed to appear the loyal young Sioux determined to carry him to the Cheyenne camp. They had been taught to regard the bonds of friendship, and nothing could have induced them to shirk their responsibility.

"We will camp here until the next sun disappears," said Sun Bird. "You have said that your people will come. It is good."

"I will live to tell this thing to my children, and they will remember that the Sioux are their brothers," replied the Cheyenne.

Then Sun Bird rode away to watch the plain while White Otter remained with the injured warrior. The lad saw that the Cheyenne was crippled for life. The leg had been broken, and there was little that the Sioux could do. He found the ends of the splintered bone, however, and attempted to bind them in place with strips of rawhide. Then he urged the Cheyenne to eat some broiled buffalo meat.

"This thing will make me walk like the old men whose bones are filled with frost," the Cheyenne declared, bitterly.

"Warriors do not walk," White Otter replied, encouragingly. "You will ride your best war-pony and kill many Pawnees."

"Your words bring sunshine into my heart; you are a good friend."

White Otter asked many questions about the Pawnees. He received much valuable information, but the two things which he was most anxious to know the Cheyenne was unable to tell him. He did not know whether the Pawnees had separated, and he was uncertain about their mission. He said his people believed they were going to a council. These words filled White Otter's heart with hope. He knew that an important council necessitated the building of a medicine-lodge, and he believed that the Red Arrow would figure prominently in the ceremonies. It was also probable that Sun Bird would find his brother in the camp.

It was almost dark when Sun Bird returned. He said that he had seen neither friend nor foe. The lads determined, therefore, to spend the night beside the river.

When they made known their plan, however, the Cheyenne objected.

"My people will return. It is dark. They will not find us here; it is bad," he said.

The Sioux instantly saw the sense of his words. They were not particularly pleased at the idea of spending the night on the battle-field, but they believed it was the wisest thing to do, and they agreed to the plan. When it was dark, therefore, they lifted the Cheyenne upon the piebald and set out in gloomy spirits. They rode in silence until the roan suddenly jumped to one side and snorted. Sun Bird looked down and saw a black object lying upon the plain. It was a dead pony.

"We are at the place where my brother expects to meet his people," he said, quietly.

"It is good; we will wait," replied the Cheyenne.

They dismounted and placed the wounded warrior upon their robes. Then they sat beside him, staring thoughtfully into the dark. They had no liking for this dreary place, and they were depressed and ill at ease. For a time they tried to rouse their spirits by talking of their experiences, but the conversa-

tion soon dragged and they finally subsided into gloomy silence.

The night was half gone when White Otter heard something which brought him to his feet. A moment afterward the piebald whinnied. An answer came out of the night. The lads fitted arrows to their bows, and listened anxiously. Then the Cheyenne uttered a low cry. A reply sounded close at hand.

"They are my people!" he cried, excitedly.

They heard galloping ponies, and within a few moments several warriors rode into view. When they saw the Sioux they aimed their arrows and warned their comrades. The wounded Cheyenne cried out to reassure them, however, and they approached. Then the entire war party came forward. The Sioux remained silent while the Cheyenne explained the situation to his comrades. When he finished speaking, an elderly warrior advanced and addressed the lads in Sioux.

"Red Dog has told me about you. You have helped him. It is good. He is my son; my heart is friendly to you. You are young men, but you are very brave. We have come here to take away our people who were killed by the Pawnees. Then we will follow

the Pawnees and fight them again. I do not know where you are going or what you will do. I am ready to help you. The Sioux are my brothers. I have said it."

"The warrior who has spoken to you is War Eagle, my father," Red Dog said, proudly. "He is a great chief, but he was not in the battle with the Pawnees."

The lads had been well schooled in the art of diplomacy, and as yet they had said nothing of their own expedition against the Pawnees. Red Dog had asked no questions and they had offered no information. White Otter knew, however, that his inquiries regarding the travelers had given the Cheyenne a clue, and he feared it would be unwise to make a secret of their destination. Besides, the lads believed that they had much to gain by forming an alliance with the Cheyennes. They decided, therefore, to tell as much of their plans as they deemed necessary.

"I have listened to the words of the Cheyenne chief," said Sun Bird. "What he says is so; the Sioux and the Cheyennes are brothers. I am crying in my heart because the Pawnees have killed many brave warriors. It is bad. War Eagle has told me that the

Cheyennes are going to fight the Pawnees again. My heart is black against those people. They have captured my brother, Little Raven. I have said I will rescue him. I will go with my brothers the Cheyennes. I have spoken it."

His words were received with approval. Many of the warriors came forward to shake his hand. Then they turned to White Otter.

"What Sun Bird has told you is true. My heart is friendly to my brothers, the Cheyennes. I will go with you to fight our enemies, the Pawnees," he said.

White Otter had several reasons for not mentioning the Red Arrow. First, because he was unwilling to acknowledge that the Pawnees had gained possession of it. Besides, it was improper to mention this sacred medicine-emblem to any one but a Sioux. He determined, therefore, to keep secret the real object of his expedition against the Pawnees.

The chief made a brief reply in which he again complimented the lads and promised to help them rescue Little Raven. Then the Cheyennes began their dismal task. They had brought a number of extra ponies to carry the dead warriors. When the bodies

had been securely lashed on these horses War Eagle selected ten men to escort them to the Cheyenne village. They started away at once, and Red Dog went with them.

"You have saved my life. I will remember this thing. I will tell my children about you," he cried to the lads as he rode away.

"There goes a brave man," said White Otter.

After the little procession had filed away into the night the Cheyenne chief led his warriors to the river. They had ridden far and fast, and they threw themselves upon the ground to rest until daylight. The lads rolled themselves in their buffalo robes and tried to sleep, but their minds were filled with thoughts of the approaching battle, and they remained awake through most of the night.

XI

ON THE TRAIL OF THE PAWNEES

AT dawn War Eagle called a council, and the Sioux were invited to take seats in the council circle. As they were unfamiliar with the Cheyenne dialect a young warrior who spoke Sioux acted as interpreter. Their hearts filled with pride, for it was their first formal recognition as warriors. The Cheyennes made a striking appearance. They had daubed their faces and the upper portion of their bodies with yellow clay from the banks of the river, and the lads looked upon them with approval. They had much confidence in these tall, sinewy warriors, and they believed they would be victorious.

"To-day we go to fight our enemies, the Pawnees," said War Eagle. "It is good. They have killed our warriors and stolen our ponies. They call us women. They have turned our hearts black with anger. We will

show our friends, the Sioux, that we are brave. Their brother is in the Pawnee camp—we will rescue him. I will ask you to be men. I have finished."

Having concluded his talk, the Cheyenne chief selected four scouts to ride ahead of the war party and look for the Pawnees. When they had received their instructions these warriors mounted their ponies and galloped away. A few moments afterward the main company of horsemen started slowly across the plain. They made an impressive spectacle. At the head rode the venerable Cheyenne chief, a striking figure in his waving war-bonnet of eagle feathers. Then came the warriors, riding two and two, stern, fearless-looking men, most of them in the very prime of life. As they rode they chanted their war-songs, and the young Sioux felt the hot fighting blood surge through their veins at the sound. They realized that the adventure might end in death, and the thought made them serious.

"We must be men," said Sun Bird.

"We are Sioux," replied White Otter.

They saw nothing of the scouts until some time past midday, and then one of them ap-

peared on the summit of a low ridge to the north. The Cheyennes stopped as he galloped across the plain to meet them.

"It is Painted Weasel; he has seen something," they told one another as the horseman drew near.

Painted Weasel said that he had discovered smoke rising above a line of trees far away to the north. At first he believed it to be a signal, but after watching it some time he became convinced that it rose from a camp. While he was talking another horseman appeared from the west.

"It is Running Crow; he brings news," said the Cheyennes.

"We will hear what he says; perhaps he has seen this thing," replied Painted Weasel.

Running Crow had learned much from the trail of the Pawnees. He said the warriors had overtaken the women and children some distance to the west. Then they turned toward the north. Soon afterward he saw a new trail from the west. These people had turned to follow their predecessors. Running Crow said there were no marks of travois-poles in the second trail, and he believed that the travelers were warriors.

A few moments later the two remaining scouts arrived from the south. They had seen nothing of their enemies.

The Cheyennes halted to hold a council of war. War Eagle said that he believed the smoke which Painted Weasel had seen marked a great Pawnee camp. He told his warriors that the company of horsemen whose trail had been found by Running Crow were undoubtedly a party of warriors who had detached themselves from a still larger company to look for the trail of their tribesmen.

Then the oldest member of the war party rose to speak. His dress and his manner convinced the Sioux that he was a medicine-man. He turned his face toward the sky, and stood a moment or two with closed eyes. The Cheyennes watched him with much interest, and it was evident that he was one whose opinion carried weight.

"My heart tells me that all the Pawnees are gathering for a big talk. I see many lodges, many women and children, many warriors. It is bad," he said, solemnly.

The lads wondered whether he would persuade his people to turn back. They studied

the grim faces of the warriors. What they saw reassured them. They believed that, having made their boast, the Cheyennes were prepared to carry it through at any cost.

"Are the Cheyennes like the antelope, which flee at the sight of many lodges?" asked a great, broad-shouldered warrior who wore a splendid head-dress of eagle feathers.

"We have come to avenge our dead brothers," declared another warrior. "We must go on."

Then they turned their eyes upon the great war-chief who had led them to so many hard-earned victories. War Eagle rose to his feet and walked slowly into the center of the circle. Although he had seen the snows of more than sixty winters, he was as straight and apparently as vigorous as any man in the war party. The Sioux found their hearts filling with admiration as they gazed upon him. They were proud to be in his company.

"Warriors of the great Cheyenne nation, you have heard what has been said. I have told you what is in my mind. Laughing Bear, the medicine-man, has told you that there is danger. It is so. Is a Cheyenne afraid to die? Then let him turn back. I

have been with you in many battles. Have you seen me run? I have said I will go to fight my enemies, the Pawnees. War Eagle does not turn around. I will keep my word to my young brothers, the Sioux. I have spoken."

The Cheyennes nodded approval to the words of their chief. Their eyes flashed the pride which his talk had inspired. There was not one among them who was not prepared to follow him into the Pawnee camp. These fearless warriors were giving a splendid exhibition of courage and loyalty, and the young Sioux were much impressed.

"War Eagle is a great chief and a brave warrior. His words are good. I have said I see many warriors. It is so. But I am a Cheyenne. I have fought in many battles. I do not run from danger. I will go to fight our enemies, the Pawnees," said the medicine-man.

War Eagle sent Painted Weasel and Running Crow to locate the Pawnee camp and learn the fighting strength of their foes. Then, with scouts riding far in advance and on either flank, the war party set out toward the north. They continued to ride until

sunset, and then they camped in a little patch of timber beside a stream.

That night they made no fires. The ponies were tied in the timber, and the camp was protected by a circle of sharp-eared sentinels. The Cheyennes sat close together, talking in low, guarded undertones, and the lads believed that they feared an attack. They wondered what had become of the two daring scouts who had ridden into the north. As the Cheyennes showed no concern about them, the Sioux believed they did not expect them before daylight.

At sunrise Painted Weasel returned. He said he had left Running Crow to watch the Pawnees.

"We have found our enemies," he declared. "The words of Laughing Bear are true. We saw many lodges, many women and children, and many warriors."

Painted Weasel told the Cheyennes that the great Pawnee camp was a full day's journey away. He said it would be folly to attempt to approach it in daylight, as they would be compelled to expose themselves on the open plain. He warned his people that they were outnumbered four to one, and he

urged them to be cautious. Then he told them that a half-day's travel to the north they would find another stream whose banks were clothed with a dense growth of cottonwoods. He advised the war party to wait there until he brought them the word to advance.

"I have listened to the words of Painted Weasel. We will do as he says," declared War Eagle.

Early in the afternoon the Cheyennes crossed the stream and went into hiding. They had scarcely picketed the ponies and posted their sentinels when they saw two riders racing wildly toward them. As the horsemen came nearer, the Cheyennes recognized them as Painted Weasel and his companion. They realized at once that something was wrong and they watched them with grave concern.

"The Pawnees are coming!" cried Painted Weasel, as he came within hearing.

As the scouts rode their sweating ponies into the timber the Cheyennes crowded around them to learn what had happened. Running Crow said that shortly after Painted Weasel had gone a solitary horseman rode

into the camp from the south. His arrival seemed to throw the Pawnees into a state of great excitement. Running Crow heard them shouting and beating the war-drums and he believed that the messenger had brought news of great importance. Then the camp quieted down, and it was evident that the Pawnees were holding a council. Running Crow became suspicious. He wondered whether the lone horseman had discovered the Cheyenne war party. A short time afterward he saw the boys and young men rounding up the ponies, and he feared that his suspicions were true. He waited until he saw a great company of mounted warriors leave the camp and ride away toward the south. Then he sprang upon his pony and raced away at top speed to tell his people. Soon after he had passed from sight of the camp he met Painted Weasel and told him what had happened. They decided that the wisest thing was to make all speed to warn the Cheyennes of the approaching Pawnee war party.

"It is good," declared War Eagle, when the scouts had told their story. "The Pawnees are coming to fight us; we will wait for them.

They have called us women. Listen to those words, Cheyenne warriors. Think about them. When you go out to meet the boastful Pawnees remember this thing."

Having inflamed the hearts of his warriors against their foes, the Cheyenne chief made preparations for the battle. He despatched several scouts to watch for the Pawnees, and then he led his war party across the stream and took up his position in the timber. It was a clever bit of stratagem, which placed a perilous barrier in the way of his enemies. To drive him from cover, they would be compelled to expose themselves in the open at a great disadvantage while the Cheyennes could shoot them down from the protection of the trees.

The warriors were chanting their war-songs and making all manner of boastful threats against their enemies. Their eagerness to fight made it evident that the encounter would be a fierce one. The Sioux watched them in thoughtful silence. Having failed to reach the hostile camp, they realized that their alliance with the war party was of no advantage. They had nothing to gain and everything to lose by fighting

the Pawnees. Having pledged themselves to their allies, however, they saw no way of withdrawing from the conflict.

"This thing has filled my heart with clouds, for now I know we will not find Little Raven," said Sun Bird.

"If we live through the battle we must find the Pawnee camp. I will not turn back until I have found the Red Arrow," White Otter declared, resolutely.

As twilight settled over the plain and they saw nothing of their foes the Cheyennes became impatient. Some of the younger warriors wished to cross the stream and ride out upon the plain to reconnoiter, but War Eagle disapproved, and urged them to wait until the scouts brought word of the Pawnees. It was almost dark when they finally saw a warrior riding toward the stream.

"It is Red Crane," said War Eagle. "He will tell us about our enemies."

Red Crane said that the Pawnee war party had just appeared, far to the west. He told the Cheyennes that the Pawnees had stopped in a little patch of trees, and that a small company of scouts were riding cautiously toward the stream.

"Painted Weasel has spoken the truth," declared the scout. "It is a great war party. One Cheyenne will fight four Pawnees."

The Cheyennes showed no concern at his announcement. It was evident that they were prepared to fight against any odds. Their calm defiance gained the sincere respect of the young Sioux. They believed that, rather than yield, these stern warriors would fight to the death, and the thought thrilled them.

"The Cheyennes are brave," said White Otter.

"I have heard my people say it," replied Sun Bird.

Having learned the manœuvers of his foes, War Eagle planned to outwit them. He believed that the Pawnee scouts would follow the stream until they found the place where the Cheyennes had crossed, and he sent a small company of warriors to surprise them. These men, all of them crafty veterans of the war-trail, waded across the stream and vanished into the timber on the opposite shore.

Soon afterward darkness fell, and the Cheyennes became alert and watchful. They concealed themselves in the bushes at the

edge of the water and listened anxiously. Fearful that the Pawnees might elude his warriors and cross the water either above or below him, War Eagle despatched Painted Weasel and another warrior to patrol the stream. Then he waited patiently for word from his scouts.

"See, a rider is crossing the stream," whispered Sun Bird, as he and White Otter lay behind a fallen tree and watched the wide lane of starlit water.

"It is one of the scouts," replied White Otter.

A few moments later the horseman rode his panting pony into the timber, and the Cheyennes gathered to hear what he had to say. He told them that the entire war party was moving slowly toward the stream. He had seen nothing of the warriors who had crossed the water, but he had heard an owl hooting somewhere in the timber, and the Cheyennes believed it was a signal.

Then they heard a ringing shout on the opposite side of the stream. It was followed by an outburst of wild yells. Realizing that the Pawnees had entered the timber, the Cheyennes rushed to the edge of the water.

They saw the little company of scouts fighting their way across the stream. The Pawnees attempted to follow them, but War Eagle led his warriors into the water and drove them back. The young Sioux fought valiantly, and when they regained the timber the Cheyenne chief complimented them for their bravery.

For some time afterward the Pawnees contented themselves with chanting their war-songs and shouting threats and insults at their foes. The Cheyennes laughed at them and dared them to cross the water. Then the mounted scouts returned. They had crossed the stream far below. They said that the Pawnee war party had divided and that a large company of warriors had turned toward the west.

"It is bad," said War Eagle. "They will cross the stream above us."

Some time later Painted Weasel brought word of this company of horsemen. He said they had crossed the stream far to the west, and had ridden away toward the south.

"What I said has come true," War Eagle declared, solemnly. "They will circle, and come up behind us."

Posting guards at the edge of the water to watch the Pawnees, the Cheyenne chief called a council of war. He told his warriors that there were two things to do. The first was to remain in the timber and the other was to retreat to the open plain. He said that in either case they might be sure of being attacked at daylight. As the Pawnees greatly outnumbered them, War Eagle was in favor of holding their position in the timber.

"I have listened to the words of the great Cheyenne chief. He speaks with wisdom. We must fight the Pawnees. If we meet them on the plain they will ride around us and kill many of our warriors. If we stay where we are they cannot ride around us. It is hard to kill a bear in its den. The trees are our friends; we will stay here. I have told you what is in my heart," said Laughing Bear.

The Cheyennes were unanimously in favor of the plan. They realized the advantage of fighting from cover, and they believed it was the only way of counterbalancing the odds against them. Having decided to retain their position, therefore, they waited calmly for the Pawnees to begin their attack. The

latter, however, had subsided into silence, and the Cheyennes believed that they were awaiting a signal from the war party on the plain.

At last, far away to the south, they heard the cry of a coyote. It was answered from the opposite side of the stream, and the Cheyennes laughed bitterly. A moment later they sent their war-cry ringing through the night; a bold defiance to their foes. Then all was still, and they knew that the Pawnees were waiting for daylight.

"My heart tells me that this will be a great battle," said Sun Bird.

"We must be very brave," declared White Otter.

XII

THE BATTLE

THE night finally passed, and the first gray hint of dawn spread slowly across the eastern sky. Still the Pawnees made no move. The Cheyennes were perplexed. They had expected an attack at daylight, and they were at a loss to explain the delay. Having nerved themselves for battle, they were anxious to begin the fight. Then the light strengthened and their suspense was ended, for they saw a long line of Pawnee horsemen riding slowly toward the cottonwoods.

"It is good; the Pawnees are coming," said War Eagle. "We will show them how to fight."

Believing that the two Pawnee war parties would attack simultaneously, the crafty Cheyenne chief divided his force to repel them. He stationed some of his warriors along the stream to prevent the Pawnees from crossing, and

posted others in the timber to resist the horsemen. The young Sioux were assigned to the latter command. Sheltering themselves behind trees, the lads fitted arrows to their bows and waited with the calmness of seasoned veterans.

Having halted beyond arrow-range, the horsemen were singing their war-songs and shouting taunts and insults at their foes. They called the Cheyennes women and dared them to come out and fight. Then, having roused themselves to a frenzy, they raised their voices in the Pawnee war-cry, and charged forward at the top speed of their ponies. At the same instant their companions left their horses in the timber and attempted to fight their way across the stream.

Assailed from front and rear, the Cheyennes fought with great fury, and the Pawnees recoiled before the stubborn resistance. Both war parties were driven back with loss, while the Cheyennes passed through the encounter without losing a man.

It was only a few moments, however, before the horsemen wheeled and made another attack. As they came within bow-shot they disappeared behind their horses and raced past,

shooting their arrows from beneath the necks of their ponies. One warrior, more reckless than his companions, rode to the very edge of the timber, and killed a Cheyenne. As he raced away unharmed the Sioux recognized him as the intrepid leader who rode the white war-pony in the previous battle with the Cheyennes.

"There is the bravest warrior in the Pawnee tribe," declared White Otter.

"I believe he will be killed," replied Sun Bird.

In the mean time the second war party had made another attempt to cross the stream. The Cheyennes stopped them before they got half-way across, however, and they retreated in wild disorder. Encouraged by their success, some of the Cheyennes rushed recklessly into the water, and two were killed, as the Pawnees turned and drove them back to cover.

Then the Pawnees became more cautious. They realized that their superiority in numbers was of slight advantage while their foes held their position in the timber. It was evident that they could not dislodge the Cheyennes without suffering heavy loss, and they were unwilling to make the sacrifice.

They determined, therefore, to wait until dark, when they hoped to steal into the timber and overwhelm their enemies in a reckless hand-to-hand conflict.

The Cheyennes watched the Pawnee horsemen with much interest. They knew that they were holding a council, and they wondered what the result would be. Then they saw a warrior detach himself from the company and ride away toward the south.

"Now I know this thing," said War Eagle. "That rider will circle, and cross the stream. I believe he is going to talk with his brothers. It is good; we will watch for him."

Feeling sure of his conclusion, the Cheyenne chief despatched four scouts to intercept the Pawnee rider. They hurried away on foot, two toward the west and two toward the east. Then the Cheyennes composed themselves to await the next move of their enemies.

The day was more than half gone when the warriors on guard at the edge of the water called the attention of their comrades to a column of smoke rising above the trees on the opposite shore. They looked upon it with concern, for they believed that the Pawnee rider had eluded their scouts and delivered

his message. The Cheyennes felt sure that the smoke signal was a reply.

"It is bad," said Laughing Bear.

The smoke had already attracted the attention of the horsemen. They were watching it closely, and the Cheyennes believed that it conveyed a message of great importance. When the signal finally faded against the sky one of the Pawnees rode almost within arrow-range of the trees. Then he stopped and imitated the howl of the great gray wolf. As the long, piercing wail echoed across the plain a mighty shout rose from the opposite side of the stream.

"The Pawnees have talked together. We must be as watchful as the fox," said War Eagle.

As the horsemen showed no inclination to renew the fight, the Cheyennes grew suspicious. They wondered whether the Pawnees were planning to combine their forces. Perhaps the warriors on the other side of the stream would abandon their position and join their companions on the plain. While the Cheyennes were discussing the possibility one of the scouts returned from the west. He said the Pawnee rider had reached the stream ahead of them

and had crossed to the other side. As yet he had not returned.

"My heart tells me that the Pawnees will wait until it is dark," said Sun Bird.

"I believe what you say is true," agreed White Otter.

As the day wore on and the Pawnees showed no further signs of activity the Cheyennes called upon their chief to lead them against their foes. War Eagle, however, was unwilling to risk a battle in the open, and he urged his warriors to remain in the timber, warning them that the Pawnees would probably renew the fight with increased fury at dark.

Then Laughing Bear rode recklessly out upon the plain. Raising his voice in the ringing battle-cry of his people, he raced his pony straight toward the group of Pawnee horsemen. As he approached, the warrior whom the Sioux had recognized jumped upon his horse and galloped to meet him. The rival war parties watched them in silence. The two warriors approached each other at reckless speed, and, once within range, they began to discharge their arrows. Both escaped the first volley, but at the next exchange the Pawnee raised his hands above his head and

fell to the ground. Whooping exultantly, Laughing Bear jumped from his pony to count coup upon his vanquished foe. Before he reached him, however, the Pawnees charged forward to avenge the death of their comrade.

As Laughing Bear galloped toward the timber War Eagle and half of his warriors raced across the plain to rescue him. They were outnumbered two to one, but the heroism of the medicine-man had filled their hearts with courage and they scorned the odds. Laughing Bear crouched low on his pony's back and the excited Pawnees were unable to hit him. Then they began to shoot at his horse. He was almost within reach of his friends when the pony was killed and the daring Cheyenne was thrown heavily to the ground.

As the stricken horse plunged to the plain the Sioux lashed their ponies to a frantic burst of speed and raced toward the unconscious medicine-man. When they reached him the Pawnees were almost upon them. There was no time to carry him away and their only hope was to hold off their foes until the Cheyennes came to their assistance. Fighting from behind their ponies, which had already been killed, the lads held the Pawnees

at bay until the Cheyennes gathered around them. The encounter was a fierce one, and both sides lost heavily. It was not long before the Sioux secured new mounts, and then they plunged into the thick of the fight. Shouting the war-cry of their people, they fought with a skill and fury which astounded their enemies and gained the admiration of their allies. Overpowered by force of numbers, the Cheyennes were compelled to retreat, but the Pawnees were slow to follow up their advantage and War Eagle and his warriors reached the timber in safety.

The lads were highly praised by the Cheyennes. Each member of the war party made an appropriate speech, which was translated into Sioux by the young warrior who acted as interpreter.

"You have saved my life. I will remember this thing," said Laughing Bear, as he offered his hand.

"I have seen many brave warriors. There are none braver than the Sioux," declared War Eagle.

The Sioux missed many familiar faces, and they realized that the Cheyennes had paid dearly for Laughing Bear's foolhardy exhi-

bition of courage. At least a third of the gallant company who rode from the timber had been killed or wounded, and the Cheyennes were gloomy and depressed.

"What I said about that fearless warrior who rode the white horse has come true," declared Sun Bird.

"It is so. He was our enemy, but he was very brave," replied White Otter.

The day passed without further fighting, and, as twilight settled upon the plain and the Pawnees showed no signs of withdrawing, the Cheyennes felt sure they were waiting to make their final assault under cover of the night. War Eagle believed that soon after dark the Pawnees on the other side of the stream would make a wide détour and cross the water. He saw no way to prevent the manœuver, for he realized that even if he posted half of his force along the stream the warriors would be too far apart to offer an effective resistance. He decided, therefore, to outflank his foes by leading his own force across the stream as soon as he learned that the Pawnees had abandoned their position. Having decided upon this plan, he sent Painted Weasel to spy upon the enemy.

"War Eagle is a wise leader, but I believe

we are in great danger," said White Otter, as the lads watched at the edge of the plain.

"I am thinking about this thing," replied Sun Bird. "If the Cheyennes are defeated we must save ourselves."

The Sioux feared that the Pawnees might surprise and overpower the Cheyennes, and the possibility caused them much concern. Having escaped death in two fiercely fought encounters, they believed that it would be foolhardy to sacrifice their lives in another vain display of bravery. They had fearlessly proved their loyalty to their allies, and they felt that it was now proper to consider themselves. As each had given a solemn promise to redeem the honor of his tribe, the lads believed that their first duty was to their own people. They determined, therefore, to take no more unnecessary risks.

The night was well advanced when Painted Weasel returned and said that the Pawnees had divided into two companies. One party of horsemen had ridden cautiously toward the west, the other toward the east.

"They will cross the stream at two places," said War Eagle. "We must fool them."

He waited until he believed that his enemies

were far out of hearing, and then he told his warriors to mount their ponies and follow him across the stream. The scouts whom he had sent out earlier in the day had already returned, and the entire war party rode cautiously into the water. They had almost reached the opposite shore when the Pawnee war-cry rang out at the edge of the timber and a shower of arrows hummed their way through the night.

Having seen Painted Weasel cross the stream, the wily Pawnees had determined to make him the means of luring his people into ambush. They had waited until they felt sure he was watching them, and then they had divided and ridden away with the apparent intention of crossing the water and joining their companions. Then when the Cheyenne had hurried across the stream to warn his comrades the Pawnees had returned, believing that the Cheyennes would attempt to retreat across the water. Thus War Eagle and his warriors had been caught in the meshes of their own stratagem.

Thoroughly surprised, the Cheyennes became demoralized. For a moment they hesitated in confusion. Then, as they saw their

comrades falling on all sides of them, they wheeled their frightened ponies and attempted to retreat. At that instant they heard the war-cry of their enemies reverberating through the timber on the shore they had just left. Their hearts failed them at the sound, for they realized that they had been trapped. Then the Pawnees charged into the water and the Cheyennes engaged them in a terrific hand-to-hand struggle.

"Die like men!" cried War Eagle. "Remember that the Pawnees have called you women!"

A moment afterward the venerable war-chief fell lifeless from his pony. Deprived of their leader, the Cheyennes became panic-stricken. Laughing Bear attempted to rally them, but he, too, was killed in the midst of his harangue. Then the Cheyennes fled from their foes and scattered like a covey of frightened quail. Most of them were cut down before they reached cover, and the few survivors galloped wildly across the plain with the triumphant Pawnees in hot pursuit.

In the mean time the young Sioux were retreating down the middle of the stream. They had lost their ponies at the first fierce onslaught, and, realizing that they could be of no

further assistance to their allies, they looked to their own safety. Dropping into the shallow water, they half swam and half crawled until they gained a sharp turn of the stream. Then they rose and moved slowly forward under protection of the dark. They feared that keen-eyed Pawnee scouts would hurry along the edge of the water to despatch any wounded foes who might attempt to reach the timber, and they dared not turn toward the shore.

"We must be very cautious," whispered Sun Bird, as they stopped to listen.

"The Great Mystery has spared our lives," White Otter declared, reverently.

They heard the Pawnees whooping triumphantly, and their hearts filled with wrath at the sound. They believed that the Cheyenne war party had been almost annihilated, and they recalled the ominous warning of Laughing Bear, the medicine-man. However, the lads had little time to think about the fate of their allies, for their own safety was far from assured and they knew that every moment was precious. They followed the stream until dawn, and then they turned to the shore and concealed themselves in a dense thicket of willows.

XIII

SCOUTING

SHORTLY after sunrise the Sioux were greatly alarmed by the appearance of two Pawnees on the opposite shore. They stood at the edge of the timber a moment, and then they turned and vanished into the shadows. As they saw them moving cautiously between the trees a few moments later the lads became convinced that these warriors were looking for them. Having figured so conspicuously in the battle on the plain the day before, they had little doubt that they had been recognized as Sioux. Aware of the bitter enmity between the two tribes, they felt sure that their foes would make every effort to find them. They believed that the Pawnees would send scouts along both banks of the stream, and they saw little chance of escape.

"This thing is bad," whispered Sun Bird. "The Pawnees have eyes like the weasel."

"If they find us, we will fight. They will see that we are as brave as our brothers, the Cheyennes," declared White Otter.

Then they heard something approaching through the bushes. Fitting arrows to their bows, the lads flattened themselves against the ground and peered anxiously through the undergrowth. A Pawnee warrior was making his way carefully along the stream. He was walking directly toward them, and the Sioux aimed their arrows at his heart. At that instant, however, the Pawnee stopped and looked toward the plain. The lads waited. Then, having evidently seen something significant, the hostile scout turned from the stream and passed at some distance from them.

"He may return; we must watch," whispered White Otter.

When half the day had gone and they saw nothing more of their foes the Sioux began to take heart. They hoped that, having failed to find them along the stream, the Pawnees would conclude that they had escaped with the little company of Cheyenne survivors. The lads realized, however, that it would be folly to venture from concealment

before they were certain that their enemies had withdrawn from the vicinity. Besides, the unexpected outcome of their alliance with the Cheyennes had completely upset their plans. They were undecided as to just what to do. The lack of ponies was a serious handicap, and still they saw no way of overcoming it. At first they thought of following their back trail in the hope of finding the Cheyenne village and securing new mounts. They knew, however, that even if they succeeded in reaching their allies the delay might prove fatal to the success of their expedition against the Pawnees. They determined, therefore, to proceed toward the Pawnee camp on foot, hoping to find an opportunity of securing horses from their foes. Having come to this bold decision, the lads waited impatiently for dark and a chance to leave their hiding-place.

Toward sunset they crept to the edge of the plain and looked for the Pawnees. They were nowhere in sight, and the Sioux believed they had gone. Still, they feared to expose themselves. They watched until night settled down, and then they left the timber and hurried away toward the north.

The lads trudged wearily through the night, and at dawn they took shelter in the bottom of a dried-out watercourse. They looked eagerly about the plain for some sign of the great Pawnee camp, but their search was fruitless. Farther to the north they saw a long line of trees, and they believed it was the same grove in which Painted Weasel had located the hostile camp. They strained their eyes trying to find a trace of smoke against the sky, but they saw nothing to suggest that their foes were still in the timber. A day's journey to the west were the foot-hills. The Sioux looked upon them in silence. They wondered whether the Pawnees had gone that far. Then Sun Bird stooped to examine something at his feet.

"See, here are pony tracks," he cried.

"I believe Painted Weasel was in this ravine," declared White Otter.

The footprints were some days old, and the lads were convinced that they had been made by the horse of one of the Cheyenne scouts. In that event, it was evident that the trees to the north marked the original camp site described by Painted Weasel. But where were the Pawnees? The perplexed

Sioux turned to each other for the answer.

"To know this thing we must go to those trees and find the place where our enemies camped. Then we can follow their trail," said White Otter.

"It is what is in my heart," declared Sun Bird. "We will wait until dark, for it would be foolish to walk over the plain in daylight."

Later in the day they saw a heavy cloud of dust to the east. As they watched it an alarming possibility flashed into their minds.

"Perhaps it is the war party that chased the Cheyennes," said Sun Bird.

"I am thinking about it," replied White Otter.

Then they saw a good-sized company of horsemen ride into view, and they feared that their suspicions were true. The riders were making toward the trees, and the Sioux believed that until they had come within sight of the timber they had been unaware that the camp had been moved. They passed at some distance from the ravine which sheltered the very foes for whom they had been searching, and the lads saw that they were leading a number of riderless ponies.

"It is good," said White Otter. "These warriors will stop to rest in the timber. Then they will follow the trail of their people. They will lead us to the camp."

"It is so," agreed Sun Bird.

The riders dismounted at the edge of the timber and turned their tired ponies upon the plain. The lads looked upon them with covetous eyes. A few moments later they saw a thin column of smoke rising above the trees, and they knew that the Pawnees intended to eat before resuming their journey.

"It is good; they will not reach the camp until the next sun. Perhaps we will have a chance to capture two ponies," declared Sun Bird.

"That would be very foolish," White Otter warned. "Then they would know that we are following them."

"What you say is true. We must not take the horses until we are ready to ride away," agreed Sun Bird.

The lads waited impatiently for the Pawnees to resume their journey. They seemed to be in no hurry, however, and the Sioux wondered whether they intended to spend the night in the timber.

"Perhaps their people left a message," said Sun Bird. "See, the smoke is blacker and thicker. My heart tells me it is a signal."

"I believe the Pawnees will return to this place," declared White Otter.

At sunset they saw two riders appear on the crest of a low ridge some distance to the west. They were watching the smoke signal. In a few moments one of the horsemen rode forward a short distance and walked his pony slowly in a circle. At the same time a Pawnee appeared at the edge of the timber. After watching the horseman a few moments he raised his voice in the weird cry of the gray wolf. Then he raised his hands to the level of his shoulders and extended the first two fingers of each hand.

"It is the sign for Pawnee," whispered Sun Bird. "My father has told me about it."

They saw the mounted warrior raise his hands to his shoulders, and they knew that he was repeating the sign of recognition. Then the two horsemen galloped rapidly toward the trees.

"They are scouts. They will guide the war party to the camp," said Sun Bird.

"It is bad," White Otter declared, solemnly.

"If those warriors have been watching, they may have seen us."

The possibility filled them with alarm. The plain offered no shelter, and as they were without ponies the lads believed that discovery would mean death. The Pawnees had gathered about the riders, and the Sioux watched them closely. However, they learned nothing to relieve their suspense. If the members of the war party had been warned by the riders, they gave no indication of the fact. The lads were unable to decide whether the Pawnees were unaware of their presence or whether they were feigning ignorance in the hope of making them the victims of some wily stratagem.

"The wolf does not creep when the deer is lame," declared Sun Bird. "If those warriors saw us, then they know we are without ponies. The Pawnees could catch us now. In the dark we might escape. I do not believe they know about us. This is how the thing is in my heart."

"You have spoken wise words," replied White Otter.

As twilight had already settled upon the plain and the Pawnees showed no intention

of leaving the timber the lads felt sure they intended to remain there for the night. This fact made them believe that the camp was at least a day's journey away. Determined to take every precaution, the crafty young Sioux left their hiding-place soon after dark and made a long détour toward the east. Then they circled, and crossed the stream.

"I believe we have done a good thing," said White Otter.

The lads made their way cautiously through the timber until they were almost opposite their enemies. Then they concealed themselves to watch and listen. They saw the glimmer of the camp-fire, and heard the Pawnees talking. Then, far away to the south, they heard the melancholy howl of the gray wolf. A hush fell upon the camp. The Sioux became suspicious. In a few moments the quavering call again rang through the night and the lads knew that it was a signal. They heard a commotion on the opposite side of the stream. It was evident that the Pawnees were mounting their ponies. Then they heard them galloping across the plain.

"It is bad," whispered Sun Bird. "I believe they know about us."

"Yes, they tried to catch us, but we fooled them," laughed White Otter.

"If we stay here they will find us. We must go away."

"We will go to the foot-hills. There we will find game. We will hide in the timber until we find the great Pawnee camp."

"It is the best thing to do," agreed Sun Bird.

Realizing that they must make the most of the night, the Sioux followed the stream toward the west. When they were some distance from the spot where the Pawnees had camped they crossed to the other shore. Then they hurried away in the direction of the low ridges which they had seen earlier in the day. They forced themselves to an exhausting pace, for they knew that to escape detection they must reach the foot-hills before daylight. It was a feat which tried their powers to the utmost, but the Sioux lads had been well trained and their splendid young bodies withstood the strain and carried them through successfully. The eastern sky was just turning gray when they stag-

gered into the timber at the edge of the plain. They struggled to the summit of the ridge and threw themselves down to watch for their enemies.

As the day wore on and the horsemen failed to appear the lads became perplexed. They feared they had been mistaken in the direction of the Pawnee camp.

"I do not know this thing," Sun Bird said, gloomily.

"My eyes are sharp, but they do not tell me what I wish to know," replied White Otter.

"Perhaps the Pawnees have ended the big talk," suggested Sun Bird. "Perhaps they have taken down their lodges and gone back to their villages."

"I do not feel it in my heart," White Otter declared, hopefully. "I believe we will find the great camp farther to the north."

Acting upon the suggestion, the lads set out along the base of the foot-hills. They had not gone far, however, when they saw the telltale column of smoke rising from a cluster of trees some distance to the north. The sight filled them with hope.

"See, there is the great camp of our ene-

mies," White Otter cried, excitedly. "At dark we will creep close to the lodges and learn what we wish to know."

"It will be hard to do this thing. If the men in the war party have told all the people about us they will be on their guard," declared Sun Bird.

"Then we will wait until they stop looking for us."

The lads continued along the base of the foot-hills until they could see the Pawnee camp. They were astounded at its size. There were several hundred lodges, arranged to form an enormous circle. The Sioux realized that the Cheyenne scouts had told the truth when they warned their people of the odds against them. Still, they did not believe that either Painted Weasel or Running Crow had referred to this enormous camp.

"Now I know this thing," said White Otter. "The people who camped at the stream were coming to this great council. This is the place where they expected to meet their people. When their scouts told them about the Cheyenne war party they went back to fight. The old men and the women and children came on here with the lodges.

That is why we did not see them. The warriors who were looking for us were the men who chased the Cheyennes."

"I believe you have told this thing as it is," replied Sun Bird.

The lads saw a great herd of ponies grazing on the plain, and they knew that they would have little difficulty in supplying themselves with new mounts. But how they were to learn whether Little Raven was in the camp and whether the Red Arrow was in the medicine-lodge they did not know. The task seemed like a hopeless one, but they had no thought of failure.

"We must wait until dark," said Sun Bird. "Then I will give the call of the great night-bird with the yellow eyes. If my brother is in the camp he will hear it, and listen. Then I will call again. He will begin to think about it. Then I will call again, and stop before the song is finished. Then Little Raven will say, 'Ah, my brother, Sun Bird, has come to help me! I must give him some sign.'"

"It is good," said White Otter.

XIV

WAITING AND WATCHING

THE night was half gone before the lads thought it safe to venture upon the plain. Then Sun Bird insisted upon going alone. White Otter was astonished. But when he objected, Sun Bird declared that it would be foolish for both to expose themselves. He said he would only go near enough to the camp to make sure that his signals would be heard.

"Then we must wait and watch," he said.

"I believe it is the best thing to do," replied White Otter.

Having promised to raise the cry of the prairie-wolf if he found himself in peril, Sun Bird took his departure. When he was some distance out on the plain he stopped and turned his face to the stars. He stood there a long time, praying earnestly to the Great

Mystery. Then he continued his hazardous journey toward the Pawnee camp.

When the young Sioux finally saw a line of trees looming up before him he knew that he was within hearing of the camp and he stopped to listen. As the stillness was unbroken he advanced cautiously to the edge of the timber. Then he again strained his ears for sounds from his foes. But only the night wind whispered out of the south.

Sun Bird had been well instructed in the art of mimicry, and there were few among his people who could equal his skill in imitating the calls of the birds and animals. When he imitated the hooting of an owl, therefore, the notes were so near perfect that the most practised ear could not have discovered the deception. He waited a few moments, and then he repeated the call. Then after a still longer interval he began the third time. At that instant, however, he heard the dogs barking in the Pawnee camp and he stopped abruptly. He realized that his signal had been heard, and the thought filled him with hope. Sun Bird felt confident that if Little Raven was in the camp he would find some way of replying.

"It is good; you have returned," said White Otter, as Sun Bird appeared before him. "Tell me what you have done."

"I have sung the song of the great night-bird with the yellow eyes. If Little Raven is in the Pawnee camp, then he has heard it. He will know this thing. He will say, 'It is my brother, Sun Bird. I will give him a sign.' We must watch," replied Sun Bird.

"Yes, we will wait here until we know this thing," agreed White Otter.

Convinced that they were in no immediate danger, the lads slept until sunrise. Then they awakened, and looked anxiously toward the Pawnee camp. Smoke was rising above the lodges, and they knew that their enemies were busy with the morning meal. The thought made them hungry. They had had little to eat since the disastrous battle with the Pawnees, and they felt weak and famished. While Sun Bird watched at the edge of the plain, therefore, White Otter scoured the foot-hills in search of game. It was not long before he returned with several grouse. As they feared to make a fire, the lads were forced to eat the birds uncooked. They accepted the hardship uncomplainingly, how-

ever, for they knew that such discomforts were the inevitable lot of every successful warrior. After they had satisfied their hunger they drank at a little spring which they had found the day before. Then they settled themselves in the timber to watch for a signal from Little Raven.

"Perhaps many suns will pass before we know this thing," said White Otter.

"We must wait," replied Sun Bird.

They watched faithfully throughout the day, but they saw nothing which they could accept as a clue. They were not discouraged, however, for they knew that even though Little Raven had heard the signal, several days might pass before he would think of a way to communicate with them.

As darkness finally settled down, the lads saw the gleam of the distant camp-fires and heard the beating of the war-drums. It was evident that the Pawnees were celebrating an important ceremony. The Sioux wondered whether they were taking vengeance upon some unfortunate Cheyenne captive. Sun Bird was much depressed by the thought. He feared that Little Raven might have shared the same fate. His one hope was the

lad's youthfulness. He knew that even the most bitter foes usually spared all prisoners below the warrior age, with the idea of eventually adopting them into the tribe. But Sun Bird also knew that much depended upon the captive himself, and as he recalled Little Raven's quick, high temper and indomitable independence he had grave doubts of the lad's safety. He would willingly have sacrificed his own life to help him, but he realized that he could do nothing until he knew whether Little Raven was in the camp. Sun Bird knew that to learn this he must again venture upon the plain.

"It is dark. I will go to sing the song of the great night-bird with the yellow eyes. If Little Raven is there, then he will know that I am waiting," he told White Otter.

"Am I a woman that I must hide in the timber while my brother goes alone? No, I will go. I have said it," White Otter declared, emphatically.

"That would be very foolish," said Sun Bird. "The wise chief sends all his warriors into the fight, but he sends but one to scout. Wait until I know this thing. Then I will ask you to help me."

"Go. I will wait," replied White Otter.

Sun Bird reached the timber in safety, and spent some time listening to the sounds from the camp. The monotonous throbbing of the war-drums and the confused clamor of the dancers came to him with amazing distinctness. He waited until there was a momentary lull and then he sent his message through the night. Three times he raised the signal. Then he listened for some sound which would tell him that his brother was still alive. But as the time passed and he heard nothing which he could interpret as a reply he began to lose hope. When three-fourths of the night had gone he left the grove and made his way across the plain with a heavy heart.

The Pawnees were still beating their war-drums, and it was evident that the celebration would continue until daylight. Sun Bird would have given much for a peep into the camp, but he overcame the temptation and continued resolutely on his way, for he had promised White Otter to take no unnecessary risks.

As he neared the spot where he had left his friend, Sun Bird stopped and imitated the quick, sharp bark of the little gray fox.

Almost instantly he received an answer from the base of the ridge, and he knew that all was well. A few moments later he found White Otter awaiting him at the edge of the plain.

"I will ask you what is in your heart," said White Otter when they had entered the timber and seated themselves beside the little spring.

"I will tell you about it," replied Sun Bird. "Like before, I went near the Pawnee camp. I sang the song of the great night-bird with the yellow eyes. Then I listened a long time. I heard the Pawnees beating their war-drums and making a noise; I heard the wind moving in the trees; I heard the little night-people running through the grass. But I did not listen to those things. No, I was thinking, 'Pretty soon I will hear something better—Little Raven will send me a sign.' I waited a very long time. Then I felt sad. I was thinking, 'Perhaps my brother has gone on the Long Trail.' I prayed to the Great Mystery to tell me this thing. Then I listened. But I heard only the things which I have told you about. Then I came here. I do not know this thing; it is bad. My heart is filled with clouds."

"I have listened to your words. We will wait here another sun. Perhaps we will see a sign. If we do not see anything, then we must creep to the edge of the camp. Perhaps we will see Little Raven. If we do not find him, then we will run off two good ponies. Then I will go into the camp to look for the Red Arrow," White Otter declared.

"You are a brave warrior; we will do as you say," agreed Sun Bird.

XV

THE CAPTIVE

FOR a long time after Little Raven was brought into the Pawnee camp his lot was a hard one. The Pawnee's bitter hatred of the Sioux made him a tempting target for all manner of abuse and insults. He was compelled to do much of the camp drudgery, and was imposed upon and harassed by young and old alike. In fact, his life was made so miserable that he believed his captors intended to eventually kill him. Still, he realized that to resist would only hasten his fate. The one hope which he never abandoned was that some day his people would come to his assistance. With this thought to sustain him, he bore his trials with a calm indifference which finally earned the respect, if not the good-will, of his enemies.

Then he found an opportunity to gain the favor of the great war-chief, Two Moons.

Straight Feather, the chief's son, a lad about the age of the young Sioux, was seized with cramps while swimming in the river which flowed past the camp. At the time Little Raven was collecting firewood along the shore. When he heard the piercing cries from the river and saw the Pawnee lad raise his hands and sink from sight, the Sioux plunged into the water and swam to his assistance. Reaching the spot where Straight Feather had disappeared, Little Raven dove and brought the unconscious lad to the surface. Then he towed him safely to the shore, where he was speedily revived by his people.

Two Moons was sincerely grateful for this act of generous heroism, and from that time Little Raven's lot was more endurable. He and Straight Feather became friends, and they spent much time sitting together, conversing in the sign language. As their friendship strengthened, however, it became necessary to find an easier means of expressing their ideas, and it was not long, therefore, before each learned the dialect of the other.

"It is good; now I can tell you what is in my heart," Straight Feather said, in Sioux, when they felt that their education was complete.

"Your words are like the songs of the birds to my ears," Little Raven replied, in the Pawnee tongue.

"Then I will tell you something. You are a Sioux. Your people are my enemies. My people are your enemies. There will be much fighting. When I become a warrior I shall probably kill many Sioux. But you have saved my life, and my heart is friendly toward you. Whatever happens, I will never kill you. I have said it."

"I have listened to your talk. You have spoken like a good friend and a brave warrior. When you fight with the Sioux you will probably be killed. But I will tell you what is in my heart. Whatever comes, I will never try to kill you," replied Little Raven, as he offered his hand.

As the months went by the Sioux lad was gradually taken into comradeship by the young Pawnees, and it was not long before he became prominent in their sports and pastimes. His prowess with the bow and his superb horsemanship soon gained the admiration of the older Pawnees, and they looked upon him as one destined to become a great warrior. They were careful to afford

him no opportunity to escape, however, and as he had been warned not to go beyond bow-shot of the village he was debarred from the hunting-parties organized by his companions.

At the end of a year Two Moons formally adopted Little Raven as his son. As there was no other alternative, the lad accepted the honor without in any way compromising his loyalty and allegiance to his own people.

"This thing has filled my heart with sunshine," said Straight Feather.

"I am your brother, but I am a Sioux," Little Raven reminded him.

There were some in the Pawnee camp, however, who became intensely jealous of the lad. The most bitter of these implacable foes was Standing Elk, the Pawnee medicine-man. This warrior was second in influence and power only to Two Moons himself. Little Raven soon realized that he was a crafty and vicious enemy. Standing Elk never lost an opportunity for prejudicing the minds of his people against the young Sioux, and but for the loyal support of Straight Feather and the vigorous interference of his father there were times when Little Raven surely would have been made the victim of

the medicine-man's burning hatred. The lad knew that it would be foolhardy to attempt to defend himself, as he realized that such action would be certain to turn the entire tribe against him. He suffered the persecution without protest, therefore, consoling himself with the hope of eventual escape.

"Standing Elk is a brave warrior, but his heart is black against his enemies, the Sioux. It is bad. He will set many traps to catch you. You must be as crafty as the wolf. I have told you this because you are my brother," said Straight Feather.

"You have a good heart. I will remember this thing. What you say is true. I will be as watchful as the fox," replied Little Raven.

Several days later a horseman rode into the camp from the north. Little Raven saw at once that the warrior was a Pawnee, and he believed that he was a messenger from some distant tribe. He wondered whether the rider brought a summons to war. The Pawnees showed considerable interest in the travel-worn visitor, and that night Two Moons called the warriors to a council.

"We are going away from here," said

Straight Feather, some time later, when they were in his father's lodge. "That warrior who came here on the spotted pony is Dog Robe. He comes from the camp of Yellow Cloud, the great war-chief of the Pawnee nation. Yellow Cloud tells his brother, Two Moons, that it is time for the big council. We will travel a long journey across the plain, until we meet our brothers. Then we will make a great camp near the hills. It is good; the warriors will sing and dance, we will race our ponies, and the old men will sit together and tell their wonderful stories."

The announcement filled Little Raven's heart with hope. The proposed expedition suggested all sorts of encouraging possibilities. He believed that the long journey across the plain might offer him an opportunity to escape. But even if that hope proved false, there was a possibility of encountering a Sioux war party. And as a last resort he hoped that he might be able to slip from the great camp while the Pawnees were absorbed in their ceremonies. Altogether, therefore, the proposed plan filled him with delight, but he was careful to conceal his elation from the young Pawnee.

"Will all the Pawnees go to this great council?" he asked Straight Feather.

"No, Crazy Bear and his people, who live far away to the south, will not go. This great chief is very old, and he cannot travel so far. When it is time for the wonderful medicine-dances, then all my people will go to his village, for it is where the great medicine-trophy is kept," replied Straight Feather.

"What is this great medicine-trophy?" inquired Little Raven.

"You are my brother, but I cannot tell you, for you say you are a Sioux. It was brought to my people a very long time ago."

At daylight the camp was the scene of bustling activity. The squaws took down and packed the lodges; the boys brought in the horses, the warriors rode about shouting instructions, and the old women abused everybody who interfered with their attempt to cook the morning meal. Soon after sunrise, however, the various tasks were completed and the entire tribe started upon the trail.

The cavalcade was an interesting one. First went a picked company of scouts. Then followed Two Moons and the messenger from Yellow Cloud. After them rode the

main company of warriors. A short distance behind the fighting-men came the pack-horses, carrying the camp equipment, the old people, and most of the women and children. Another company of warriors followed far in the rear; and on either flank rode small parties of young lads, watching eagerly for any sort of game that might show itself.

Little Raven rode just behind the warriors, in company with Straight Feather and a number of young Pawnees. His mount was an aged buckskin which plainly showed the evidences of long and continuous abuse. It was wind-broken and lame, and the young Sioux realized that with such a steed beneath him all chance of escape was gone.

"Why does the great chief Two Moons give his son a horse which should carry an old man?" he asked, banteringly, as Straight Feather rode beside him.

"That pony has carried my father in many battles. I have heard him tell about it. My horse has never been in battle. Only warriors ride the war-ponies. It is good; Two Moons has a good heart for his son Little Raven. He has given him this great war-pony," Straight Feather replied, craftily.

Three days the Pawnees traveled toward the north, and then they came to a river and turned toward the west. Late that day two warriors, who had crossed the river to look for buffaloes, returned and said that a small party of Cheyennes were encamped a short distance away. When he heard this Two Moons ordered a halt and called a council. The Pawnees decided to attack the Cheyenne camp under cover of the night, in the hope of running off the ponies.

As soon as it was dark, therefore, the warriors who had agreed to go crossed the river and scattered to surround their foes. It was not long before their triumphant war-whoops rang through the night, and the anxious listeners on the opposite side of the water knew that they had been successful. Shortly afterward they returned with five ponies which they had captured from the Cheyennes. The Pawnees said that although they had completely surprised the Cheyennes, three of the latter had fought their way through the circle and made their escape.

"It is bad," said Two Moons, when he learned what had happened. "Those warriors will tell this thing to their people.

The Cheyennes are very brave. I believe they will gather a big war party and come to fight us."

The following day the Pawnees forded the river and continued their journey across the plain. They heard nothing of the expected war party until late in the day, and then the scouts who had been riding far in the rear dashed up with news of a great company of mounted warriors approaching from the east.

"It is the war party!" cried the Pawnees.

The cry threw the entire company into a state of great excitement. The shouts of the warriors, the frightened cries of the women and children, the yelping of the dogs, and the neighing of the ponies were combined in a deafening uproar. For some moments all was confusion. Then Two Moons mounted his favorite white war-pony and took command. His voice rang out sharp and forceful above the clamor, and the tumult was instantly stilled. When he had gained the attention of the people he briefly outlined his plan of action. The main camp, under the protection of the old men and a small company of scouts, was to flee toward the foothills while the warriors went to fight the

Cheyennes. As the latter were already within sight, there was not a moment to spare. Raising the piercing battle-cry of their nation, Two Moons and his fighting-men raced across the plain to meet their foes, and the women and children, accompanied by their escort of men and boys, fled wildly toward the west.

For a moment Little Raven believed that the opportunity for which he had waited so long was at hand. But when Standing Elk, the medicine-man, was given command of the little force detailed to protect the camp his hopes died. He realized that that wily foe would take every precaution against his escape, and he knew that the vengeful Pawnee would be quick to seize upon an excuse to destroy him. Therefore, the young Sioux determined to take no chances, for he felt sure that his life would be the penalty for an unsuccessful attempt to get away.

Straight Feather and some of the older lads had gone with the war party, and Little Raven found himself riding alone in the midst of a frightened company of chattering squaws and crying children. They were followed by the warriors who had been sent

to protect them, while on either side rode the old men and the young boys. Standing Elk kept close to the young Sioux, and the lad smiled grimly as he realized the significance of his precaution. The retreat was continued until the end of the day, and then the refugees stopped for the night in a dense stand of timber far to the west of the scene of battle.

At daylight they resumed their journey, and shortly after sunrise the war party overtook them. Having won a decisive victory and captured many ponies, the Pawnees were greatly elated. They approached, singing their war-songs and waving their trophies. Several noted warriors had been killed in the fight, however, and when the people learned this, the rejoicing gave way to wailing and lamenting.

"It was a great fight," Straight Feather said, enthusiastically, as he rode beside Little Raven. "My father was very brave. His pony was killed, and as he ran across the plain four Cheyennes rode after him. But he turned and killed two of them. Then he jumped upon one of the ponies and went back into the fight. I was right behind him. I counted two coups."

"It is good; you are a warrior," replied Little Raven.

At sunset the Pawnees went into camp beside a large stream whose banks were clothed with a splendid growth of willows. As they unpacked and set up the lodges, Little Raven believed that they intended to remain there several days.

"Yes, we will wait here for Lazy Horse and his people, who will come from the west. Then we will go to the foot-hills to meet Yellow Cloud," Straight Feather explained.

Early the following day Lazy Horse and his people arrived. The two tribes decided to remain at the stream another day to rest the ponies and to celebrate Two Moons' victory over the Cheyennes. Lazy Horse said that a party of his hunters had turned off toward the south to follow a small herd of buffaloes. Shortly after midday these warriors rode into camp, each leading a pack-horse loaded with meat. They said that one of their companions had been caught in the herd. It was not long, however, before this man galloped safely into camp. He brought great news. He said that he had discovered a very large war party a day's journey to the

south. But as the riders were a long distance away he had been unable to identify them.

"They are Cheyennes," said Two Moons. "This will be a big battle."

Then he called all the warriors in council and organized a great war party. A short time afterward two-thirds of the fighting-men of both tribes rode away under the combined leadership of Two Moons and Lazy Horse. The balance of the warriors were left to protect the camp. This time the medicine-man went with the war party, and Little Raven hoped he had seen the last of him.

"I have become a man. I am going to fight. I will be brave like my father," Straight Feather told Little Raven.

He galloped away on one of Two Moons' favorite war-ponies, and the young Sioux watched him with real affection. He had learned to look upon this loyal young Pawnee as his friend, and he believed that if the proper opportunity presented itself Straight Feather might aid him to escape.

At the end of the third day the war party returned. They brought many captured ponies and several Cheyenne prisoners, but

the glory of their victory was overshadowed by grief. Two Moons and many of the most notable warriors of the tribe had been killed.

"It was a great victory, but my heart is filled with clouds. My father has gone on the Long Trail. He was a very brave warrior," Straight Feather said, bitterly.

"It is true. Two Moons was a great chief and a fearless warrior. I am a Sioux, but I sat in his lodge; that is why I am crying in my heart," Little Raven replied.

"Now I know that we are brothers," declared Straight Feather.

As he saw nothing of the medicine-man, Little Raven believed that he had been killed. The hope was a false one, however, for when he questioned Straight Feather the latter said that, having passed through the encounter unharmed, Standing Elk had gathered a small war party and had gone in pursuit of the fleeing Cheyennes.

"He is very brave and very wise; perhaps he will become our chief," said Straight Feather, looking sharply at the young Sioux.

Little Raven remained silent. The thought filled him with despair. He knew that, once in power, the medicine-man would use his in-

fluence against him, and he feared the result. However, the Sioux lad determined to banish the unpleasant possibilities from his mind, for he was unwilling that Straight Feather should discern his anxiety.

"Tell me about the battle," he said, in an endeavor to change the trend of thought.

Straight Feather proceeded to give a vivid account of the fighting, without, however, mentioning the part played by the two young Sioux. He placed particular emphasis upon the courage and skill of Two Moons, and gave little credit to the Cheyenne medicine-man who had killed him. But he said nothing about the timely rescue of that bold warrior by the Sioux, and Little Raven was unaware that his own people had participated in the battle.

The next day the Pawnees left two scouts to watch their back trail and resumed their journey under the leadership of Lazy Horse. They made their way across the plain in gloomy silence. The death of their chief weighed heavily upon them and they were disheartened and depressed. Little Raven felt pity for the Cheyenne captives, as he knew that they would be made to pay the

penalty for the killing of Two Moons and his warriors.

At sunset the travelers came in sight of Yellow Cloud's camp. As they approached, a delegation of warriors rode out to meet them, beating their war-drums and singing songs of welcome. When they learned of the death of Two Moons, however, they became silent and sorrowful. Their angry glances toward the captives told all too plainly of the fate which awaited those unhappy victims. But the Cheyennes looked defiantly into the eyes which threatened them, and the young Sioux was much impressed.

"Those Cheyennes are very brave warriors," he told Straight Feather.

The young Pawnee smiled scornfully, and remained silent.

The following day, when Standing Elk and the warriors who had pursued the Cheyennes arrived, Little Raven saw at once that something was wrong. The medicine-man and his companions seemed greatly excited, and from the angry glances which they turned upon him the young Sioux believed that he was in some way involved in their ill humor. He had little doubt that Standing Elk had already

made plans for destroying him, and he believed that unless he could escape from the camp he was doomed.

That night Yellow Cloud called a great council, and Little Raven wondered whether his fate would be linked with that of the unfortunate Cheyennes. He felt sure that Straight Feather would attempt to save him, but as the latter had only just earned recognition as a warrior, Little Raven feared that the young Pawnee's word would have little influence. Still, he refused to give way to despair. Seating himself before the entrance of Two Moons' lodge, he waited patiently for Straight Feather, from whom he hoped to learn the secret of the evil looks.

The night was far gone when the young Sioux was roused by the hooting of an owl far away to the west of the camp. His heart bounded wildly at the sound, and he listened anxiously in the hope of hearing the call repeated. A long interval of wearying suspense intervened, and then the melancholy notes again echoed faintly across the plain. Little Raven became greatly agitated. He was forced to conceal his emotion, however, as he was within sight of many people, and

he knew that, once their suspicions were aroused, all chance of escape would be lost. The anxious lad feigned a careless indifference, therefore, while he strained his ears for the final call which would tell him whether his hope was real or false. At last, after a long, torturing wait which had sapped the courage from his heart, he heard the notes the third time. At that instant, however, the dogs caught the sound and began to bark, and the call ceased abruptly. Then Little Raven recognized it as a signal from his brother, Sun Bird, and his excitement almost betrayed him. He was overjoyed, as he realized that at last his people had come to his assistance. However, he knew that he must carefully guard the secret, for he believed that upon learning that his tribesmen were near, the Pawnees would kill him at once. Little Raven knew that his first task would be to communicate with his friends, and he searched his brain for a plan. It promised to be a difficult problem, and he wondered whether it would be wise to take Straight Feather into his confidence.

At that moment the young Pawnee returned from the council circle. He was

gloomy and thoughtful, and Little Raven feared that he was the bearer of bad news. The Sioux wondered whether Standing Elk had accomplished his purpose. For some time the lads sat beside each other in silence. Then Straight Feather rose and entered the lodge. A few moments later he called Little Raven.

"You are my brother; I will tell you what is in my heart," he said, as the young Sioux seated himself beside him. "When we fought the Cheyennes we saw two Sioux. They were very brave. They killed many of my people. After the battle we looked for them, but they escaped. Crooked Horns and Whistling Bear, who waited behind when we left the stream, saw them hiding in a ravine. They told Standing Elk and his war party. Standing Elk said, 'It is good; we will surround them when it is dark.' But when they surrounded the place the Sioux were not there. The medicine-man is very mad. He has told the Pawnees how those Sioux killed many of my people. He says the Sioux are our enemies. He says the Pawnees must kill them. He says you are a Sioux. Yellow Cloud's people were very mad, and they said,

'What Standing Elk says is true; the Sioux must die with the Cheyennes.' But my people said: 'No, we will not do this thing. Two Moons was a great chief—Little Raven is his son—no, you must not do this thing.' But if you stay here Standing Elk will make them mad against you. You must escape. You have saved my life—I will help you."

"I have listened to your words, and I know that you are my friend. I will tell you something. I have heard the call of the great night-bird. It is good; I know it is a signal from my brother," said Little Raven.

"Now I know about it," replied Straight Feather. "Those two Sioux have followed us. I believe they are hiding in the foothills. I will not tell this thing. No; I will help you."

The two lads spent the following day discussing various plans for Little Raven's escape. The Pawnees had decided to put the Cheyennes to death that night, and the young Sioux thought that would be the safest time to attempt to get away. Straight Feather, however, frowned upon the plan. He said that Standing Elk might have guessed that Little Raven had been warned of his evil intentions.

Then he would be on his guard, and the young Pawnee declared that they would be closely watched until daylight. He cautioned Little Raven to do nothing until he could plan a way to save him.

"You are my friend; I will do as you say," agreed the young Sioux.

When it was dark the Pawnees made preparations for the ceremonies which would end the lives of the Cheyenne captives. Little Raven was much affected as he saw the brave-hearted warriors led out to meet their fate. They showed no fear, however, and as they were escorted to the spot selected for their execution they raised their voices in the ringing war-cry of their nation.

While the Pawnees were yelling and dancing about their helpless victims Little Raven again heard the signal from the west. It drove the horrible scene from his mind and filled his heart with courage. A significant glance from Straight Feather convinced him that he, too, had heard the call. A short time afterward he saw the young Pawnee talking earnestly with some of the most influential men of the tribe, and he believed that the wily lad was already busy with a plan for saving

him from the vengeance of the medicine-man.

"It is good; now I know how to do this thing," Straight Feather said, exultantly, when they finally retired to the lodge. "At the next sun I will lead a party to the foothills to hunt. You will go; the people of my tribe have said it. I have said I will never try to kill you. Keep those words in your heart. Perhaps you will escape. But you must not kill my friends."

"You are my brother. I will remember it. No, I will not kill your friends. I will tell my brother about it. But if I escape Standing Elk may kill you," Little Raven replied, uneasily.

"I am the son of Two Moons; I have counted coups in battle—my people will listen to my words," Straight Feather declared. proudly.

XVI

THE ESCAPE

THE sun was barely above the rim of the plain when the young Sioux, watching from the timber, saw five horsemen leave the camp and turn their ponies toward the foot-hills. They watched them with considerable anxiety, and, as the riders seemed to be making directly toward their hiding-place, the lads wondered whether they had been discovered. They waited in nervous suspense to see if the horsemen would continue in their course. When they came within arrow-range, however, they turned abruptly toward the south and rode along parallel with the low range of hills. At that moment the Sioux saw that these horsemen were lads no older than themselves.

"See, that rider on the spotted pony wears his hair in two braids!" White Otter whispered, excitedly. "He is not a Pawnee."

"He is my brother, Little Raven," Sun Bird said, quietly.

Then he crept carefully into the bushes along the edge of the plain and whistled the song of the white-crowned sparrow. The lad on the spotted pony raised his hand to his hair, and Sun Bird knew that he had heard and interpreted the signal.

"Little Raven has sharp ears," he said as he rejoined his companion.

The riders having passed, the Sioux rose and moved cautiously along in the shelter of the trees. They were at a loss to know exactly what Little Raven would do, but they felt confident that he was carrying out some carefully planned stratagem. They kept within bow-range, therefore, prepared to render assistance whenever it became necessary. When the Pawnees finally turned and rode to the edge of the timber the lads fitted arrows to their bows and hid in the bushes close at hand. They expected Little Raven to make a bold dash for liberty, and to strengthen his confidence Sun Bird repeated his signal. A moment later, however, the Sioux looked at each other in amazement, as Little Raven dismounted and surrendered his pony to one

of the Pawnees. Then the three other Pawnees dismounted, and Little Raven accompanied them into the timber.

"I do not know this thing," whispered White Otter, in much surprise. "It is bad. If we run out and capture the ponies the Pawnees may kill Little Raven."

"Wait," cautioned Sun Bird.

They began to study the young Pawnee who guarded the ponies. He was a well-built youth about their own age, and the eagle feather in his scalp-lock told them that he had achieved success on the war-trail.

"I believe he is the leader," said White Otter.

"It is a hunting-party," explained Sun Bird.

Then the young Pawnee turned toward the woods, and the Sioux saw Little Raven appear at the edge of the timber. They believed that he was about to make his escape and their eyes lighted with excitement. But as Little Raven advanced toward the Pawnee the lads saw that he limped painfully. Then the whole daring stratagem suggested itself to their minds. Having accompanied the young Pawnees to the foot-hills, the wily lad had feigned injury in the hope of gaining

possession of the ponies. That the crafty trick would be successful was apparent when the Pawnee gave up the horses and hurried into the woods, apparently rejoicing in the opportunity to join the hunt.

Once the Pawnee had disappeared, Little Raven looked expectantly along the edge of the plain. Then as he again heard the notes of the little bush-bird he led the ponies slowly toward the sound. Realizing that their opportunity was at hand, the Sioux crept forward to meet him.

"I have heard you, my brother. Come, we will escape," Little Raven said in a low tone as Sun Bird hailed him.

"It is good," Sun Bird said, hurriedly. "But tell me, is there in the Pawnee medicine-lodge a Red Arrow which is worth many ponies?"

"Come, first we must ride away. Then I will tell you about it," Little Raven replied, impatiently.

"No, I must know this thing," declared White Otter as Sun Bird turned to him.

"You have heard my words. Is this great medicine-trophy in the Pawnee camp?" insisted Sun Bird.

"No, it is in the camp of the great war-chief Crazy Bear, many suns' travel toward the south. Are we women that we stand here talking about these things?" cried Little Raven.

"Now I will go," said White Otter.

The lads mounted the three best ponies and rode slowly away from the timber, taking the two remaining horses with them. They were almost out of arrow-range when they heard a ringing shout behind them. Realizing that they had been discovered, they lashed the ponies into a gallop and rode boldly away toward the south.

"See, the warriors have seen this thing," cried White Otter, pointing toward the camp.

Glancing over their shoulders, the lads saw a number of riders racing wildly across the plain. Other horsemen were rounding up stray bunches of ponies, and the Sioux knew that they would be hotly pursued. They heard the young Pawnees yelling excitedly at the edge of the timber, and they turned and shook their weapons at them.

"Come, we must ride fast," cried White Otter. "The Pawnees have better ponies."

"It is true," replied Little Raven. "The war-ponies are very swift."

The Sioux had a substantial lead, but it was more than offset by the speedier ponies of their pursuers. The Pawnees gained steadily, and at the end of the day the leaders were almost within arrow-range. The lads realized that, once brought to bay, they would instantly be surrounded and attacked on all sides. As the plain was bare and shelterless, they knew that in such a one-sided battle they would soon be annihilated. Their one hope, therefore, was to hold off the Pawnees until dark. The Sioux had already abandoned the two slower animals, and now as the twilight shadows gathered they urged their ponies to the breaking-point in a final effort to escape from their foes.

The Pawnees, however, were making equally strenuous efforts to get within bow-shot. They knew that unless they could force the Sioux to a stand before night closed down their long chase had been in vain. But the light was fading fast, and each moment lessened their chances of success. The mere thought of defeat drove them into a frenzy. Uttering wild yells of rage, they lashed their

AND NOW AS THE TWILIGHT SHADOWS GATHERED THEY URGED THEIR PONIES TO THE BREAKING-POINT

exhausted ponies into a killing sprint in the hope of overtaking the daring lads who had outwitted them.

"The Pawnee horses are near, but they have left their speed upon the plain," White Otter cried, encouragingly.

At that instant one of the leaders collapsed, throwing its rider heavily to the ground. The Sioux took heart as they realized that the Pawnee ponies had expended their strength.

"That warrior who fell is Standing Elk. He is a great leader," said Little Raven.

"It is good; perhaps the others will stop," replied Sun Bird.

The hope was vain, however, for the Pawnees were not to be discouraged. It was evident that they would continue the pursuit as long as their horses kept their feet. Night was almost at hand, but the captured ponies were gasping pitifully and the lads feared that they would collapse at any moment. They were holding their lead, however, and the Sioux made no attempt to force them.

Then darkness came to their aid, and they were hidden from their foes. Determined to make the most of their advantage, they turned

abruptly toward the east in the hope of throwing the Pawnees from their trail. When they believed that they were safe from pursuit the lads stopped and dismounted. They listened anxiously, but the peace of the night was undisturbed and they believed that the Pawnees had decided to postpone further pursuit until daylight. Realizing the necessity of placing as much distance as possible between their foes and themselves, the Sioux trudged wearily over the plain, dragging their drooping ponies behind them. They had not gone far, however, when they heard the call of the gray wolf, far off to the west of them. A few moments later they heard an answer in the same direction, and their spirits rose at the sound.

"It is good," declared Sun Bird. "The Pawnees are far away. We have fooled them."

A short distance farther on they came to a small stand of willows, and as they found a tiny pool they decided to camp there until dawn. They attended the exhausted ponies, and then they spent some time listening at the edge of the plain. But as they heard nothing to indicate that the Pawnees had

found their trail, they believed that they were safe until daylight. They seated themselves in the little grove and ate some dried meat which Little Raven had smuggled from the Pawnee camp. Then he told his experiences, and how Straight Feather had made it possible for him to escape.

XVII

THE COUNTRY OF THE EVIL SPIRITS

WHEN the Sioux failed to see anything of their foes at dawn they felt quite certain that the Pawnees were searching for them near the foot-hills. Reassured by the thought, the lads decided to tarry at their camp site until both they and their ponies were thoroughly rested. While Little Raven watched, therefore, White Otter and Sun Bird surrendered to their exhaustion and fell into a heavy slumber.

The day was more than two-thirds gone when they finally awakened and looked anxiously about the plain. When they questioned Little Raven he said that he had seen nothing except a band of antelope far away to the west.

"The deer have outwitted the wolves," laughed Sun Bird.

White Otter showed little enthusiasm. He

was silent and thoughtful and seemed to be much distressed. Sun Bird studied him with grave concern. It was the first time he had seen his friend in this mood, and he wondered whether White Otter was weakening in his resolve. But the mere thought seemed unworthy of a Sioux, and Sun Bird drove it from his mind. At last he asked the dejected lad the reason for his low spirits.

"You have found your brother; it is good. You will return to your people. I must go to Crazy Bear's village to find the Red Arrow. It is a dangerous journey; I will not ask you to go. I may never see you again. My heart is filled with clouds," White Otter said, gloomily.

"Now I know this thing," cried Sun Bird. "We are brothers. Does a Sioux turn from the war-trail and leave his brother? It is not in my heart. You have said you will go to Crazy Bear's village. It is good; we will do this thing. When you have found the Red Arrow, then I will return to my people."

"You have spoken the words of a brave warrior," said White Otter. "You have driven the clouds from my heart. If we do

this great thing I will tell my people about you."

"Sun Bird has told you what is in my heart," declared Little Raven. "I will go to Crazy Bear's village. Perhaps I shall become a warrior."

Having pledged themselves to remain together, the lads proceeded to hold a council of war. Little Raven said Straight Feather had told him that Crazy Bear's village was five suns' travel south of Two Moons' original camp. The young Pawnee had also told him that to reach the Pawnee village it was necessary to cross the Country of the Evil Spirits.

"Tell us about that place," urged Sun Bird.

Little Raven said that the Pawnees told many gloomy tales about a strange country far to the south, which was the dwelling-place of all the Evil Spirits. The old men said that these Evil People had emptied all the springs, destroyed all the vegetation, and killed all the game. Then they had excavated holes and caverns in the rocks, into which they had withdrawn to lie in wait for the unwary traveler who might venture into their country. The Pawnees declared that many of

their people had fallen victims to these warlike spirits, until Owl Chief, a famous medicine-man of Crazy Bear's tribe, finally made a truce between the Evil Spirits and all the Pawnees. Then the Evil People poured the water back into two springs, one for each day's journey through their country, and planted grass about the borders of each pool. The grass soon withered and died, however, and the head chief of the Evil Spirits told Owl Chief that when his people desired to pass through that country they must carry food for themselves and their ponies. Then, according to the Pawnees, the Evil People showed Owl Chief the trail through their country. Owl Chief was warned that if he marked or in any way designated this highway, except by telling it to his people, the pools would be drained and the Evil People would bring torture and death to all who attempted to follow him. The Pawnees claimed, therefore, that none but they could travel safely through the desolate Country of the Evil Spirits.

White Otter and Sun Bird listened to the strange tale with grave attention. When it was finished they sat absorbed in thought.

They shared the vivid imagination and simple superstition of their people, and the story made a strong impression upon their minds. It seemed foolhardy to attempt to cross that forbidden country in the face of such a warning. Besides, they were not even sure that Crazy Bear's village was on the other side of the barrier, for they realized that the young Pawnee might have deceived Little Raven as to the true direction of the camp. But as Little Raven had already proclaimed his faith in Straight Feather's veracity, they determined to accept the information as genuine. There was nothing to do, therefore, but to continue. Having set out to recover the great medicine-trophy, they were determined that nothing but death should stop them. Little Raven had been watching them with much interest, and even before they spoke he read their decision in the defiant flash of their eyes.

"I have promised to bring the Red Arrow to my people; I must go on," said White Otter.

"It is the only thing to do; we will go with you," Sun Bird declared, promptly.

"Yes, we will help you do this great thing," agreed Little Raven.

Having seen nothing to arouse their suspicions, the Sioux planned to remain in the grove until the following day. Just after sunset they saw the band of antelope slowly approaching the timber. Aware that they were coming to drink at the little pool, the lads fitted arrows to their bows and concealed themselves at the edge of the plain. It was not long before the unsuspecting animals came within range, and the Sioux killed two young bucks.

"It is good," laughed Sun Bird, as they dragged the carcasses toward the grove. "The Great Mystery has sent us meat."

Feeling safe from the searching eyes of their foes, the lads made a small fire of dry sticks. Then, to guard against a repetition of their unpleasant experience with the uncooked grouse, they dried as much meat as they could conveniently carry.

That night the Sioux held a council to discuss plans for their perilous journey to the distant Pawnee village. Little Raven declared that they must first return to the site of Two Moons' original camp. Then he said that by traveling directly south they might find the place where the Pawnees entered the Country of the Evil Spirits.

"Yes, it is the best thing to do," agreed White Otter.

Early the next day the lads set out to find the place where Two Moons and his people had established their village. By making a wide détour toward the east they finally found the trail which White Otter and Sun Bird had followed with the Cheyenne war party. Then they came to the scene of the disastrous battle with the Pawnees. They saw many grim reminders of the tragedy, and they hurried from the spot with heavy hearts. Three days later they found the abandoned Pawnee camp site on the bank of a good-sized river.

"When I went away from here I was sad because I was a prisoner. Now I have come back, but I am free and my heart is filled with sunshine," declared Little Raven.

The Sioux spent the night at the deserted camp. The following day they resumed their journey toward the south. At sunset they killed two buffaloes, and as they found water and grass close by they decided to stop. Determined to take every precaution against disaster, the lads made three water-bags from the hide of the buffaloes. Each of these bags would hold a day's supply of water for the

traveler and his horse. The Sioux believed that by economizing, however, they might make their combined supply sustain them at least three days, and they hoped before that time elapsed that they would have crossed the Country of the Evil Spirits, or at least have found one of the springs.

"My heart tells me we will do this thing," Sun Bird said, encouragingly, as they wrapped themselves in their robes.

"Your words make me feel very brave," replied White Otter.

Before they set out at dawn they filled the water-bags and gathered a supply of grass for their ponies. Then they again turned their faces toward the south. As the day wore on the lads noticed a distinct change in the appearance of the plain. The grass had disappeared, and for a long distance they traveled through a monotonous stretch of sage. Then that, too, died out, and the plain became a desert. They came upon several pools, but the water was strong with alkali, and they passed them by.

At the end of the day the lads found themselves upon the threshold of a bleak, uninviting waste of rock and sand which stretched

away as far as the eye could see. It was a weird, fantastic region, studded with grotesque monuments of gray weather-worn rocks, and the Sioux looked upon it with gloomy forebodings. It was dry, and dead, and different from any place they had ever seen. As they studied it they felt their hearts filling with a strange superstitious awe which quite overpowered them. The place seemed to have cast an evil spell upon them, and all sorts of horrible possibilities crept into their minds.

"It is the Country of the Evil Spirits," whispered Little Raven.

The sun had already set and the purple evening shadows added to the somberness of the scene. As the light gradually failed, queer, distorted shadows crept out from the base of the rocks and the vast solitude became peopled with phantoms of the night.

Then it grew dark, and the lads turned from the dreary desolation and made their camp far out on the barren plain. There was neither grass nor water, and they levied grudgingly upon their meager supply. Then they sat close together in the dark, talking in subdued whispers of the mysterious country

which barred their way. At last they spread their robes and tried to compose themselves for sleep. Their efforts were useless, however, for the story told by the Pawnees kept running through their minds. They were restless and wakeful, and they passed most of the night staring up at the stars and wondering what fate awaited them in the Country of the Evil Spirits.

It was barely daylight when they mounted their ponies and advanced slowly toward the mysterious land to the south. They rode some distance apart, and kept a sharp watch for tracks, but the ground was hard and sun-baked and their search was vain. They stopped when they reached the border of the great barren waste, and Little Raven dismounted to wait while Sun Bird rode slowly toward the east and White Otter went toward the west. They hoped by this manœuver to discover the place where the Pawnees entered the Country of the Evil Spirits. It was not long, however, before the two lads returned and said that they had found the task hopeless.

"We must go on," declared White Otter. "We have weapons and food and water for

ourselves and our ponies. Are we warriors? Then we must travel through this place with brave hearts."

"Your words are good; we will remember that we are Sioux. Are the Sioux frightened by the silly stories of the old men in the Pawnee village? Come, we will prove our courage," Sun Bird cried, encouragingly.

Aroused by his words, the dauntless courage of their people asserted itself, and they entered the great trackless waste, prepared to face whatever perils awaited them. They rode slowly along within sight of one another, with their eyes fixed upon the ground. They saw nothing to guide them, however, and as the day wore on and they went farther into the dreary desolation they gave up the search and took their bearings from the sun. They believed that two days' journey toward the south would bring them safely out on the other side of the desert. The belief encouraged them, and they rode confidently along until dark. Then, having failed to find water or any evidence to prove that they were moving in the proper course, they became somewhat depressed. They stopped, and gave the ponies a scant ration of grass,

and a few mouthfuls of tepid water from the buffalo-hide bags. Then they poured some of the precious liquid into their own parched throats. Having consumed more than half of their supply, they realized that unless they succeeded in finding their way to the plain or came upon the second water-hole the next day their plight would be serious.

When the long night finally passed without bringing an attack from the fierce spirits mentioned by the Pawnees the lads turned their faces to the sky and gave thanks to the Great Mystery. Having saved them from those unseen foes, whose existence the superstitious young Sioux never thought of doubting, they believed he would eventually lead them safely to the open plain. Strengthened by the thought, they began the second day with renewed courage. However, as the day progressed the sun's fierce heat was reflected from the ground in hot, stifling blasts which soon sapped the strength from both the ponies and their riders. To add still further to their discomfort, their lungs and eyes were filled by a fine, sifting smother of alkali dust which rose from beneath the horses' hoofs. Each moment added to their suffering, and by the

time the sun had reached the zenith their agony was intense. They had been forced to twist about and turn from their course to avoid blind pockets and other impassable barriers, and they feared that there was little chance of finding the coveted pool. They had almost exhausted the supply of water, and they were hoarding the balance in the hope that it might sustain them through another day. The ponies were beginning to lag, and to spare them the lads dismounted and walked.

"It is bad," Little Raven said, huskily. "My throat is filled with fire."

"A warrior does not tell those things," Sun Bird cautioned him.

Trudging wearily along at the head of his pony, each lad fought his battle in grim silence. They saw the sun sink slowly in the western sky and their spirits sank with it. They realized that the coming of darkness would necessitate a halt for the night, and they dreaded to think of the long black interval of sleepless agony which awaited them. They had serious doubts that either they or their ponies would have sufficient strength to resume the journey at daylight. The thought

urged them to greater efforts, and they sought to quicken their pace. But the jaded beasts behind them were unable to respond, and the lads were forced to abandon the effort.

The twilight shadows were gathering when the Sioux saw something white half buried in the ground a short distance ahead of them. Upon reaching it they found that it was the bleached skeleton of a horse. It told a grim story, and they gazed upon it in silence. A short distance farther on they found the whitened bones of its rider. Then the whole sad tale suggested itself to their minds. The unfortunate wanderer had attempted to cross the lonely waste and, having lost his way, had wandered about until his pony dropped from exhaustion. Then he had attempted to go on alone, but his strength failed him, and there in that lonely solitude he had met his doom. The lads turned away with gloomy thoughts.

What they saw, however, convinced them that they had turned too far toward the west. They believed that the safe highway through the weird place was some distance to the east. They turned in that direction with fresh hopes, but before they had gone far they came

upon an impassable barrier, and while they were searching for a way around it grew dark.

They offered the ponies the last of the grass, but the poor beasts were choking with thirst, and they were unable to eat it. Then the lads attempted to relieve their own sufferings by pouring a few drops of liquid into their burning throats. It seemed only to aggravate the agony, and they found it difficult to resist the temptation to drain the scant supply still remaining in the buffalo-hide bags. Then they turned to the meat, and by hard chewing they succeeded in extracting some moisture from that. They knew that their one hope was to move toward the east on the following day, and they determined to make one final effort in that direction.

Sunrise found them staggering gamely along in front of their exhausted ponies. They were confronted by all sorts of exasperating obstacles, but they fought their way around them with grim persistence, for they knew that their lives depended upon the success of the day's work. At midday they stopped in the shadow of a great boulder. They gave the choking ponies the water from two of the water-bags, and divided half of

the remainder among themselves. Then they resumed their wearisome journey. It seemed hopeless, but they reminded one another that they were Sioux and that they must fight to the end.

The day was far gone when White Otter suddenly raised a feeble cry and fell to his knees. Believing that he had collapsed, his companions reeled to his side, and found him staring wild-eyed at the ground. There was unmistakable evidence that a horse had passed that way at some time. The sign was old, but it put new life into them. Then, while the excited lads were searching in different directions for a hoof-print or some mark to give them the direction of the trail one of the ponies raised its nose into the air and uttered a weak, gasping whinny. Then it trotted away toward the south, dragging Little Raven with it. The other ponies instantly followed, and the lads made no attempt to stop them. Within several arrow-flights the clever little beasts brought them to a large pool at the base of a great pyramidal rock.

"It is good," gasped White Otter. "The Great Mystery has saved us."

The Sioux and their ponies drank heartily, and the clear, cool water gave them life. When the lads offered the horses the grass which they had refused the night before they ate it ravenously. By the time it was dark the lads, too, had recovered their strength and spirit. Confident that they would find the plain early the following day, they wrapped themselves in their robes and slept soundly throughout the night.

At daylight they filled the water-bags and set out toward the south. As they proceeded they marked the trail behind them, for they had lost all fear of the Evil People, whom the Pawnees held in such respect. Before the sun had covered a quarter of its circuit they emerged safely from the Country of the Evil Spirits and found themselves upon the border of a vast rolling prairie.

"The sun shines in my heart," cried White Otter, as he inhaled great breaths of the fragrant air.

"My ears are filled with music," said Little Raven.

"In that place I was an old man; now I am young again," declared Sun Bird.

XVIII

WITHIN SIGHT OF THE GOAL

AFTER searching in vain for some sign of the Pawnee camp the lads made their way cautiously across the prairie. They were alert and watchful, for they feared that discovery would bring failure to their undertaking. They had not gone far in this new country before they began to see all sorts of game. A covey of prairie-grouse rose before the ponies and sailed off into a dense thicket of willows; a band of antelope ceased feeding to watch them go by; a coyote jumped from behind a boulder and raced away at top speed; and a pair of hawks circled about high above them.

"It is good; in this place everything is alive," declared White Otter, as he glanced significantly over his shoulder at the grim solitude from which they had escaped.

Then they came to a low rolling swell of

the plain, and Little Raven remained with the ponies while White Otter and Sun Bird crept carefully to the summit of the ridge to reconnoiter. Farther to the west they saw a stream, whose course they marked by the long, winding lane of trees which lined its banks.

"Perhaps Crazy Bear's village is along that water," said Sun Bird.

They searched the sky for a trace of smoke, but although they watched a long time they saw nothing to indicate that the camp was anywhere near. They were somewhat perplexed. The young Pawnee had assured Little Raven that Crazy Bear's camp was five suns' journey from his own village. The Sioux believed that if the information were genuine they should already be within sight of their goal. Then they suddenly remembered that they had lost a day wandering about in the Country of the Evil Spirits. That suggested another possibility. Perhaps the Pawnee village was still a sun's travel farther south. The two lads were in a quandary. At last they decided to remain where they were until dark. Then they would separate to look for the camp. Hav-

ing come to this decision, they returned to the ponies and proposed their plan to Little Raven.

"My brothers, you have been on the war-trail—you are warriors. I will obey your words," Little Raven declared, loyally.

They decided that White Otter should ride toward the west to reconnoiter along the stream, that Sun Bird should make a wide half-circle toward the east, and that Little Raven should scout toward the south. It was further agreed that they should meet at the starting-point before daylight. When it was dark, therefore, the three lads set out, having selected the long, mournful howl of the prairie-wolf as the danger-signal, and the quick, sharp bark of the little gray fox as the sign of recognition.

Little Raven was the first to return, and as he neared the rendezvous he stopped his pony and imitated the bark of the little gray fox. He waited some moments, and then he repeated the signal. Still he received no reply. Aware that his companions had not arrived, he began a cautious advance. When he reached the top of the ridge he raised the call the third time. Then, a short distance

to the west, he heard the answer, and he knew that White Otter was returning. A few moments later the lads met at the base of the rise.

Little Raven said that he had ridden far toward the south, but had failed to discover the Pawnee village.

"It is bad," said White Otter. "I rode to those trees. Then I followed the stream, but I did not find the Pawnee village."

"Perhaps Sun Bird will tell us about it," Little Raven suggested, hopefully.

"Yes, perhaps he will see something," replied White Otter.

However, as the time passed and their comrade failed to appear the lads became somewhat anxious. The night was almost gone, and they wondered what had delayed him. Each moment increased their anxiety, and they began to fear that he had met with some misfortune. Still, they had heard nothing to indicate that he was in peril. But they got slight comfort from that thought, for they had been far away, and they realized that they might have failed to hear his signals of distress. Finally, just as the first tinge of gray showed in the east they heard the bark

of the little gray fox close at hand. They replied, and soon afterward Sun Bird joined them.

"You have been far," said White Otter, as he looked upon the panting, sweat-lathered pony of his friend.

"I have found the Pawnee village," replied Sun Bird.

His companions were overjoyed at the announcement. In reply to their eager questions Sun Bird told them that the Pawnee camp was far away toward the east. He said that he had located it by the flicker of the camp-fires. He had watched some time from the summit of a distant ridge. Then, fearful that what he saw might only be the camp of some wandering hunters, he had gone sufficiently near to convince himself that it was really Crazy Bear's village.

"My ears told me this," he said. "I heard the women and children and the dogs. Then I knew that it was a big village. I did not go to it. I do not know how many lodges are in that camp. But I saw many fires, and I believe it is a big camp."

"It is good," declared White Otter. "Now I know that we will do this great thing."

Soon after sunrise the lads set out toward the distant village. They rode with great caution, for they knew that at any moment they might come in sight of a Pawnee hunting-party. They saw many antelope and a small herd of buffaloes, but as they still had several days' rations of meat they made no attempt to hunt. At midday they saw smoke rising from behind a distant rise of the prairie and they knew that they were within sight of the goal. Realizing that it would be foolhardy to expose themselves in daylight, the Sioux began to look for a hiding-place. They saw a small cluster of trees a short distance to the south, and Little Raven proposed that they should conceal themselves in that cover.

"No, that would be foolish," declared White Otter. "If the hunters leave Crazy Bear's village they will go to those trees to look for game. See, over there is a gully; we will hide in that."

"Your words are wise," agreed Sun Bird.

A short time afterward White Otter saw his suspicions verified, when a small company of horsemen appeared over the low ridge which hid the Pawnee camp and rode directly

toward the square of trees. As they drew near the cover they scattered and closed in upon the grove from all sides. The lads watched them in thoughtful silence. They were wondering what would have happened if they had been trapped in the timber.

"What you said has come true," said Little Raven. "I was very foolish."

"I have heard the old men say that it is the war-trail which teaches wisdom," Sun Bird told him.

"It is true; I will remember it," replied Little Raven.

Having failed to find game in the grove, the hunters had disappeared toward the west. Their appearance had filled the lads with grave concern. They feared that when the Pawnees returned they might ride into the ravine. As there was no other hiding-place except the timber, the possibility filled them with alarm. But they realized that it would be still more perilous to leave the gully and attempt to retreat across the open plain, for they knew that at any moment the horsemen might return and discover them.

"We must wait here and watch," said White Otter.

"Yes, my heart tells me it is the best thing to do," replied Sun Bird.

Late in the day they saw the hunting-party returning. To the lads' delight, however, the riders were some distance to the south, and the Sioux had little fear of being discovered. It was evident that the Pawnees had been successful, for as they drew nearer the lads saw that most of the ponies were carrying a generous supply of meat in addition to their riders.

"When those warriors have gone then we will leave this place and go to the timber," proposed White Otter.

At that moment something frightened one of the Pawnee ponies, and it shied and threw its rider. Then the alarmed horse wheeled and raced wildly across the plain in the direction of the ravine which concealed the three young Sioux. A number of Pawnees started in pursuit, and the lads watched the race with bated breath. The runaway appeared to be holding its lead, and the Sioux realized that unless it was speedily overtaken their discovery was certain. They staked their hopes on a clean-limbed little piebald which was rapidly distancing the rest

of the pursuers. But in spite of the fact that it was easily drawing away from its companions, it seemed unable to gain upon the fugitive. As the latter had already covered half of the distance to the ravine, the lads began to lose heart. They had little doubt that they would be discovered, and they began to think about making a bold dash for liberty. Then the rider on the piebald began to use his heavy rawhide quirt, and the fiery little pony redoubled its speed. Stride by stride it shortened the lead of the runaway, and when he was within arrow-range of the gully the Pawnee reached forward and grasped the rawhide thong which dangled from the lower jaw of the escaped horse.

"That spotted pony is our friend," White Otter said, solemnly, as they watched the Pawnee cantering away with his captive.

"It is very fast," replied Sun Bird.

It was almost dark when the Sioux left the ravine and took shelter in the grove. Then they began to discuss plans for recovering the Red Arrow. They agreed that it would be necessary to make a preliminary reconnaissance, for they realized that they could do nothing until they located the medicine-lodge

and the corral containing the swift war-ponies. Then came a difference of opinion. Having arrived safely within sight of his goal, White Otter was determined to take every precaution against a final blunder which might end all chance of securing the prize. For that reason he insisted upon going alone to reconnoiter the camp. However, when he proposed the plan, his companions raised serious objections. The discussion which followed was long and fiery, but White Otter finally won his friends by promising to assign each of them a part in the final enterprise.

"Two do not go to know what one can see," he told them.

"You speak wise words; we will listen," replied Sun Bird.

"It is good; now I will go," cried White Otter, as his eyes lighted with excitement.

When the young Sioux came in sight of the twinkling camp-fires he stopped and watched them a long time. Then, after he had offered a simple petition to the Great Mystery, he rode cautiously toward the camp. He advanced until he heard the familiar noises of the village. Then he dismounted and muzzled his pony. A few moments later he

came upon a dense thicket, and after he had assured himself that it was free from foes he concealed his horse and continued toward the village on foot.

White Otter neared the camp with the silent stealth of a fox. He knew that an instant's carelessness might cost him his prize, and perhaps his life, and the thought made him alert and cautious. When he came within bow-shot of the village he stopped to listen. As he heard nothing to arouse his suspicions he dropped to his hands and knees and crawled carefully toward some small boulders which loomed up a short distance in front of him. He reached them in safety, and found himself close upon a lodge at the border of the camp. Realizing that once the fires died down it would be almost impossible to distinguish the medicine-lodge, White Otter knew that there was not a moment to spare. He dragged himself slowly over the ground, therefore, until he was at the very edge of the village. Still he could see only a small portion of the camp, and he told himself that he must go on. His heart was filled with fear of the dogs. He knew that at any moment they might discover him and raise the alarm.

The Sioux had gone half the length of the camp when he finally saw a great lodge which was decorated with the figure of the mysterious Thunder Bird and other magical symbols. It stood alone in the center of the village, and the sight of it caused White Otter's heart to beat fast with excitement, for he recognized it as the medicine-lodge. He waited long enough to fix its location firmly in his mind and then he continued his daring reconnaissance until he heard a horse squeal in anger. A few moments later he located the corral at the north end of the camp.

Well pleased with his success, the young Sioux was about to begin a cautious retreat when he was dismayed by the sound of voices directly behind him. The speakers were within several bow-lengths of him, and he dared not move. For a moment it seemed as though his heart would burst through his chest. Hastily fitting an arrow to his bow, the trembling lad flattened himself against the earth in the hope of escaping detection. He hoped that the unseen prowlers would soon pass on and leave him to make his escape in the darkness. As he listened, however, he discovered that they had stopped.

From the sound of their voices it was evident that they had seated themselves for a serious talk. White Otter was in a frenzy of despair. He saw no way of escaping while they remained, and yet he knew that each moment's delay increased his peril. His position was desperate, for he feared that before very long some of the dogs would be sure to discover him. Roused by the thought, White Otter began to worm his way along an inch at a time. After each short, painful advance he stopped to listen, but as the Pawnees continued their talk he knew that they had failed to hear him. Every inch gained gave him greater confidence, and when he had finally gone a quarter of an arrow-flight he rose to his knees and began to crawl. At double that distance he sprang to his feet and sped away into the night.

Day had dawned when White Otter finally rejoined his companions. He told them what he had seen, and declared that they must enter the Pawnee camp the following night.

"I have listened to your words; I am ready," said Sun Bird.

"It is a very brave thing to do. Perhaps we will be killed, but I am not afraid," declared Little Raven.

XIX

THE RED ARROW

THE lads waited in the timber until the long day finally came to an end. Then, as the gray twilight shadows began to settle upon the plain they mounted their ponies and set out for the Pawnee camp. They were silent and thoughtful, for they realized that to accomplish their purpose each of them would be compelled to risk his life. White Otter, who had become the leader of the little war party, had issued his instructions earlier in the day, and each lad was thoroughly prepared for his part in the undertaking. Little Raven had been ordered to remain close to the border of the village with the horses. Sun Bird had been asked to make his way to the corral and secure three fast war-ponies. While for himself White Otter had reserved the difficult task of entering the medicine-lodge in search of the Red Arrow.

When they finally galloped their ponies to the crest of the ridge from which they expected to see the twinkle of the distant campfires, the lads stopped short, and stared off into the night in speechless amazement. All evidence of the village had disappeared. For a moment White Otter and Sun Bird feared that their eyes had failed them, and they turned to Little Raven for proof.

"I see nothing there," said Little Raven.

"It is bad," White Otter declared, uneasily.

"Perhaps the Pawnees know about this thing," Sun Bird suggested.

"Yes, we must be very cautious," replied White Otter.

Two possibilities suggested themselves to the minds of the perplexed young Sioux. They believed that the Pawnees either had moved their camp or had learned of White Otter's visit the night before and were hiding in ambush to surprise any foes who might again attempt to approach the village. The latter possibility seemed the more probable, and the lads were much disturbed by the thought. They realized that they might already have blundered into a trap, and they

listened for some sound which would tell them that their approach had been discovered. Hearing nothing to confirm their fears, they dismounted and muzzled the ponies. Then they conferred together in low, guarded whispers.

"We must know this thing. There is only one way. I will go," White Otter declared.

As he was the acknowledged leader of the party his companions were forced to respect his decision. They made no objection, therefore, when he proposed to go upon his solitary reconnaissance. They watched him with gloomy forebodings as he mounted his pony and disappeared into the night.

"White Otter is very brave," Little Raven said, admiringly.

"Yes; I believe he will be a fearless war-leader, like his grandfather, the great chief Wolf Robe," replied Sun Bird.

Half the night had passed when they heard the sharp bark of the little gray fox.

"It is good; White Otter is returning," Little Raven whispered, excitedly.

"Yes, he has escaped," Sun Bird replied, with unconcealed relief.

A few moments later White Otter rejoined

them. He had removed the buckskin muzzle from his pony, and his companions knew that the Pawnees were at least out of hearing. White Otter said that the village had disappeared. He told them that he had reconnoitered carefully about the deserted camp site in the hope of picking up the trail, but darkness and the hopeless maze of tracks all about the vicinity made the task impossible before daylight. He proposed that they should remain where they were until dawn, and then go to the abandoned camp to look for the trail.

"It is very bad; but I will follow this camp until I find the Red Arrow," declared White Otter.

"You are a good leader; we will go with you," Sun Bird promised him.

The eager lads reached the Pawnee camping-place before sunrise the following day. Leaving Little Raven to watch from a high rise of ground, as a precaution against the possible return of their enemies, White Otter and Sun Bird circled slowly about the vicinity, searching for the trail. They learned the reason for the removal of the village when they discovered the large spring which

had supplied water to the Pawnees—it was almost dry. Shortly afterward they found the tracks of the travelers leading away toward the south, and they called Little Raven and set out upon the trail.

"We will soon find these people," Little Raven declared, confidently. "I have told you about Crazy Bear. He is very old; he cannot travel far."

"Yes, I am thinking about it; I believe what you say is true," replied White Otter.

Toward the end of the day the lads saw their hopes verified, as they discovered the camp a short distance ahead of them. It was situated on the bank of a small stream which flowed from the west and which they believed was a tributary of the larger stream which White Otter had reconnoitered. Having located the village, the Sioux turned toward the east and concealed themselves in a stand of aspens.

When it was dark the lads deserted the timber and rode to a rise of the plain from which they could see the glimmer of the Pawnee camp-fires. Then White Otter left his companions and hurried away to reconnoiter the camp. It was not long, however,

before he returned and told them that he had again located the medicine-lodge in the center of the village and the war-ponies in a temporary corral at the north end of the camp. He also said that he had found a small herd of horses grazing near the village, but had passed them by, knowing that the choicest animals were confined in the corral.

The lads realized that they could do nothing until the camp became dark and quiet, and they watched anxiously for the twinkling lights to disappear. While they waited they rehearsed every detail of the daring plan in which they were soon to risk their lives. As they talked, the fires diminished and melted into the night, and when the last flickering light faded from their sight the Sioux nerved themselves for the perilous task before them.

"We must wait," White Otter cautioned. "The people have gone to the lodges, but the dogs are walking around the camp. They will fight over the bones, and keep the old women awake. We must wait until they are asleep."

They waited some time longer, and then Sun Bird imitated the dismal wail of the

prairie-wolf. The lads listened anxiously as the lonely cry echoed across the plain, but as the moments passed and there was no response they felt more at ease.

"The dogs are asleep," said Sun Bird.

"We will go," replied White Otter.

The lads rode silently across the vast starlit prairie, each sobered by the thought that he might be riding to his death. But they were not afraid. Sustained by the inherited courage of their people, they entered upon the reckless adventure with the quiet confidence and calm assurance of veterans. Each was determined to faithfully perform the work assigned to him. They were in grim earnest. There was no idle boasting; they preferred to prove their courage by their actions.

When they came within arrow-range of the camp they dismounted, and White Otter issued his final instructions. Little Raven was to lead the horses to the north end of the village and wait there until White Otter and Sun Bird joined him with the war-ponies. Sun Bird was to enter the camp and make his way directly to the corral. Then he was to select the three speediest-looking ponies and

wait until White Otter joined him. The latter said that if the Pawnees should capture him he would warn his companions with the cry of the coyote.

"Then you must ride away and save your lives," he said, magnanimously.

His comrades, however, promptly refused the offer.

"If you should be killed, then we will go away with heavy hearts to tell our people about you. But if you should be captured then we will not go away until we rescue you," Sun Bird declared, loyally.

"It is good, my brothers; I will think about your words," replied White Otter.

Then White Otter and Sun Bird left their ponies with Little Raven and hurried away on foot. As they neared the village they stopped to listen. All was quiet, and they advanced through the dark as silently as shadows. When they finally saw the dim outlines of a lodge looming up a short distance ahead of them they sank noiselessly to the earth. They were almost upon the edge of the camp and they realized that they must separate. The thought brought a twinge of grief. Each was about to risk his life, and

they had serious doubts of ever meeting again. Still, there was no other alternative, and they knew that it was not the part of warriors to weaken. They looked steadily into each other's eyes as they clasped hands.

"Sun Bird, you are my brother; if you should be killed my heart will always be filled with clouds," whispered White Otter.

"I will lock your words in my heart. You have called me your brother. It is so. If the Pawnees should kill you then I will rush into the camp and kill many of their warriors," declared Sun Bird.

After Sun Bird had disappeared into the darkness White Otter rose and stood some moments with his face upturned to the sky, praying fervently to the Great Mystery. Then he sank to his hands and knees and crawled cautiously to the edge of the camp. It was black and still, and the young Sioux hoped that both the Pawnees and their dogs were sleeping soundly. A hasty reconnaissance convinced him that he was too far to the south, and he turned and moved carefully along the border of the village. When he finally saw the black form of the medicine-lodge looming out of the night he stopped

and gazed upon it with eager, flashing eyes.

White Otter spent many precious moments listening at the edge of the camp. Then, as he heard nothing to arouse his fears, he believed that his opportunity was at hand. The thought sent the blood rushing to his brain and set his heart beating wildly. A host of alarming possibilities passed through his mind, and for a moment he was unnerved. He wondered whether Sun Bird had entered the camp. The thought of his friend restored his courage, and he regained his composure. A moment afterward he fitted an arrow to his bow and advanced boldly into the village.

The young Sioux stopped in the shadow of the first lodge and peered anxiously into the dark. The camp appeared to be wrapped in heavy slumber, and, emboldened by the thought, the lad advanced swiftly toward the center of the village. As he neared the medicine-lodge he slung his bow upon his back and drew his knife. Then, cautiously, a stride at a time, White Otter moved toward his goal. He was almost at the door of the lodge when he heard a child crying sleepily in one of the lodges behind him, and, fearful

that the sound might awaken the dogs, he glided into the shadows and stood as immovable as a statue.

He waited in much suspense until the child had been quieted, and then, as all was silent, he resumed his stealthy advance. When he reached the medicine-lodge he lingered a moment at the entrance to listen. Then he drew aside the buffalo robe and entered. In the impenetrable blackness in which he found himself White Otter was unable to ascertain whether the lodge was occupied. He groped his way cautiously forward in the dark, prepared to defend himself with his knife. However, as the moments passed and he was not attacked he believed that the shelter was unoccupied. He felt carefully about with his hands until he located a tripod of poles in the center of the lodge. Then he began to tremble violently, and his breath came in quick, short gasps, for he realized that the prize was almost within his grasp. From the poles were suspended the medicine-trophies, and the excited lad ran his fingers over them until he found the sacred Red Arrow which had been stolen from his people. It was only the work of a moment to free it from the poles,

and then the exultant lad hurried toward the exit.

As White Otter staggered from the medicine-lodge in a delirium of joy a gaunt form rose from the ground and sprang at him. The suddenness of the attack bewildered him, and he was borne to the earth. He found himself in a life-and-death struggle with a great wolflike hound, which was trying to sink its fangs in his throat. After a few moments of desperate fighting the Sioux succeeded in burying his knife behind the dog's shoulder, and as the dying brute rolled aside the lad sprang to his feet. Except for a few scratches he was practically unhurt. But the sounds of the encounter had aroused the other dogs, and the camp was in an uproar. Realizing that a moment's delay would be fatal, White Otter ran through the village like a frightened deer. The dogs raced after him, baying fiercely, and twice he was compelled to stop and kill the leaders with his arrows. Then he heard shouts and saw dim, shadowy forms emerging from the lodges, and he raced away at top speed.

White Otter reached the corral in safety, and found Sun Bird waiting with three restive

war-ponies. Once mounted, the lads drove the other horses from the village and raced for the open plain. They picked up Little Raven near the border of the camp, and, abandoning their own slow mounts, the triumphant young Sioux galloped away on the three swiftest ponies in the Pawnee tribe. They knew that it would be a long time before the Pawnees would be able to find and round-up the horses on the plain, and they had little fear of being caught.

"Have you done this great thing?" Sun Bird asked, eagerly, as they raced along beside each other.

"See," laughed White Otter, as he exhibited the famous medicine-trophy.

"Now I know that you are a great leader, like your grandfather," declared Sun Bird.

Far behind them the Sioux heard the wild commotion in the camp, and, flushed with triumph, they turned their faces to the sky and gave thanks to the Great Mystery. Then they laughed mockingly as a volley of discordant yells rolled out over the plain.

"My brothers, you have been very brave; you have helped me do this great thing. My people will wish to see you. You must

go with me to my village. I will tell my grandfather about you. He will talk about this thing. His warriors will listen to his words. You will feel glad in your hearts," said White Otter.

"It is good; if we escape we will go with you to talk with our brothers, the brave Ogalalas," agreed Sun Bird.

XX

THE REWARD

MANY days had passed since White Otter rode away on his perilous mission, and the Sioux talked about him as one who had gone upon the Long Trail. Only Wolf Robe and old Yellow Horse, the medicine-man, still believed that the lad might return. Sustained by the thought, the stern old war-chief stood at the edge of the village each day as the sun sank in the west and gazed expectantly across the plain until dark. The people looked upon him with pity, for they knew that his heart was breaking with grief. Each night as he returned to his lodge the old men shook their heads and said: "Wolf Robe is crying in his heart for White Otter. If the lad does not return the great chief will soon follow him on the Long Trail."

Then one day near the end of the summer

some boys who had been playing a short distance out on the plain rushed into the village and cried out that three riders were approaching from the south. The Sioux became greatly excited, and a company of warriors quickly mounted their ponies and galloped away to meet the visitors.

"Perhaps it is White Otter," cried the Sioux, as they gathered at the border of the village.

Then one of the riders raced madly back to the camp and said that White Otter was returning with two young warriors from the Minneconjoux tribe. The village was thrown into an uproar by the announcement. The people were wild with joy, and their first thought was of their beloved chief.

"Tell this thing to Wolf Robe," they cried.

They found the aged warrior arrayed in all his finery, waiting calmly in his lodge. When they cried out that White Otter was coming, Wolf Robe nodded his head and said, "It is well; I have waited many days."

As the warriors escorted White Otter and his companions into the village the people crowded about them in an ecstasy of delight. White Otter heard them calling to him and

shouting his name, but he made no response. He rode directly to his grandfather's lodge and presented himself before the famous Sioux war-chief. Only the flash of his eyes betokened the joy in Wolf Robe's heart as he rose and extended his hand to his grandson.

"You have returned; it is well. I will ask you what you have done?" he said.

"Grandfather, you have often told me that deeds, not words, make a warrior. I have remembered it. I have brought the Red Arrow from the Pawnee medicine-lodge," White Otter said, quietly, as he presented the precious trophy to the Sioux chief.

For some moments Wolf Robe remained silent while he looked admiringly upon the splendid lad before him. He accepted the sacred medicine-trophy and examined it with much interest. Then he returned it to White Otter.

"My son, I have listened to your words. They are the words of a Sioux warrior. You have done a great thing. My heart is filled with pride. I am an old man, but you have made me feel young again. I will tell the people about it. You shall carry this great medicine-trophy to the medicine-lodge."

When Wolf Robe had finished speaking old Singing Wind, the lad's grandmother, came forward to greet him. "You are very brave, like your father, Standing Buffalo, and your grandfather, Wolf Robe," she said, proudly.

Then White Otter told his grandfather of the splendid heroism of his companions, and Wolf Robe called the two lads into his lodge.

"White Otter has told me about you," he said. "You are very brave. The Minneconjoux are our brothers. It is good that you have come to our village. I have heard about your father, Rain Crow. I know that he is a great medicine-man. I will tell my people about you."

"You are a great chief. I have heard my people talk about you. Now I have taken your hand. I will tell this thing to my people," replied Sun Bird.

That night Wolf Robe summoned the entire tribe to the medicine-lodge. When all the people had assembled the venerable war-chief took the long stone pipe filled with the bark of the red willow and smoked to the Great Mystery, to the sun, to the earth, and to each of the four winds. Then he passed the pipe to Yellow Horse, the medicine-man,

who sat at his left. Thus it went from one to another, until all in the council circle had smoked. Then the pipe was returned to Wolf Robe, who placed it upon two forked sticks which had been driven into the ground. A few moments later he rose to address his people.

It was a notable company, and the old chief's eyes lighted with pride as he looked into the faces of the men who sat about him. They were battle-scarred veterans of the war-trail, all of them heroes. They were men of keen minds and brave hearts; eloquent orators and indomitable warriors; men fit to counsel and able to command. Among them were Yellow Horse, a man of great wisdom and dauntless courage; High Eagle, who had twice escaped from the Kiowas; Thunder Dog, who had killed many Pawnees; Spotted Bear, who had rescued his brother from the Blackfeet; and the aged warrior, Crying Wolf, whose body bore the scars of many conflicts.

"People of the great Dacotah nation," said Wolf Robe, "I have called you here to tell you about a great thing. White Otter, the son of Standing Buffalo, has brought the Red

Arrow from the Pawnee medicine-lodge. The Pawnees are our enemies. They have killed Standing Buffalo and many of our people. It is good that a Sioux has taken this great medicine-trophy from their village. I have thought about this thing a long time. Now it has been done. My heart is filled with pride."

When Wolf Robe had finished speaking the people demanded that White Otter should tell the story of his great exploit. As the lad rose to his feet in response to their cries he was overcome with emotion. He realized that he had become a great warrior among his people, and his heart filled with pride. When he had somewhat recovered his confidence he gave a vivid account of his adventures, being careful to give full credit to Sun Bird, and a generous share of praise to Little Raven. As he ended his talk he walked to the tripod which supported the medicine-trophies and fastened the red arrow at the top of the poles.

"It is good," cried Yellow Horse, springing to his feet. "What I have dreamed has come true. See, the son of Standing Buffalo has brought the great medicine-trophy to his people."

Then old Crying Wolf struggled to his feet. He had seen the snows of more than ninety winters, and he was bowed and tottering with age. He presented a pathetic appearance as he leaned heavily on his coup-stick and addressed the people in a weak, faltering voice.

"Men of the Dacotahs, listen to my words. I am a very old man. My hair is white with the snows of many winters. My bones are filled with frost. But I have seen this wonderful medicine-trophy brought to my people. It is enough. My heart is filled with peace. I am very happy. White Otter is a great warrior. I will soon go on the Long Trail, but this thing will be told to many other people. The Sioux laugh at their enemies, the boastful Pawnees. I have finished."

Other noted warriors spoke in turn, and White Otter and his companions were highly commended for their courage. When the speeches were concluded the Sioux made several great fires in the center of the village, and passed the balance of the night singing and dancing in celebration of White Otter's great achievement.

THE REWARD

The following day Wolf Robe escorted the lad to a large corral at one end of the camp and showed him more than a hundred ponies.

"You have done a great thing for your people," said the war-chief. "The Sioux have brought you these ponies because you are a great warrior."

"My heart is full of words which I cannot speak," replied the embarrassed young Sioux.

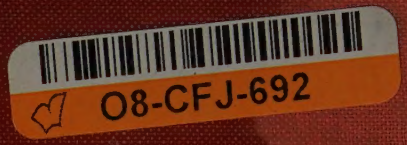
Then White Otter hurried away to look for his friends. When he found them he brought them to the place where the ponies were confined.

"See, in that place are many ponies. My people have brought them to me. It is good; we are brothers. When a Sioux has much, he does not forget his brother. When you return to your people I will give each of you a very fast war-pony and a good horse to carry you in the hunt. I have said it."

"You have a good heart. I will tell about this thing," said Sun Bird.

"Now I am a warrior," declared Little Raven.

THE END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